



The Collected Teachings of Ajahn Chah

Volume 1
Daily Life Practice



Aruna Publications

Preface

The teachings of Venerable Ajahn Chah that have been translated into English and made available in this three-volume edition are direct and clear. It gives me great joy to know such wisdom is being widely distributed.

I had the good fortune of living with or being near Ajahn Chah between 1967 and 1977, which were the peak years of his teaching life. After I received bhikkhu ordination in NE Thailand (Nong Khai Province) in May of 1967, my preceptor had sent me to Wat Nong Pah Pong Monastery for training. It was during that first Rains Retreat (*vassa*), living under Ajahn Chah, that my faith and confidence in this way of practice really arose. During those ten years I had an opportunity to study and come to understand the relationship between Dhamma and Vinaya (discipline), to develop insight into emptiness and form and to recognize the suffering that was caused by my ignorant attachments to conditioned phenomena.

Ajahn Chah's approach to teaching and training is simple and practical. It is a perfect tool for cutting through the delusions of self, cultural and social conceits, and our thinking process. Now his recorded teachings have been translated into English and are available for the asking. I am indeed grateful for all the work that has gone into translating and compiling, and to the sponsors who have made this publication freely available.

The teaching of the Buddha is a great gift and most necessary to deal with the problems of modern societies. May this collection of teachings bring benefit to many.

Luang Por Sumedho, November 2010

Introduction

THE THAI FOREST TRADITION

THE VENERABLE AJAHN CHAH often reminded his disciples that the Buddha was born in a forest, was enlightened in a forest and passed away in a forest. Ajahn Chah lived nearly all his adult life following a style of Buddhist practice known these days as the Thai Forest Tradition, a tradition which adheres to the spirit of the way espoused by the Buddha himself, and practises according to the same standards the Buddha encouraged during his lifetime.

This lineage is a branch of the Southern School of Buddhism, originally known as the *Sthaviras* (in Sanskrit) or *Theras* (in Pāli), later referred to as the Theravāda school. 'Theravāda' means 'The Way of the Elders', and that has been their abiding theme ever since. The ethos of the tradition can be characterized as something like: 'That's the way the Buddha established it so that is the way we'll do it.' It has thus always had a particularly conservative quality to it.

From its origins, and particularly as the main religion of Sri Lanka, Theravāda Buddhism has been maintained and continually restored over the years, eventually spreading through South-East Asia and latterly from those countries to the West. As the religion became established in these geographical regions, respect and reverence for the original Teachings have remained, with a respect for the style of life as embodied by the Buddha and the original Sangha, the forest-dwelling monastics of the earliest times. This is the model that was employed then and is carried on today.

There have been ups and downs throughout its history; it would develop, get rich, become corrupt and collapse under its own weight. Then a splinter group would appear and go off into the forest in order to return to those original standards of keeping the monastic rules, practising meditation and studying the original Teachings. This is a pattern that has been maintained over the many centuries.

In more recent times, in mid 19th century Thailand, the orthodox position held by scholars was that it was not possible to realize Nibbāna in this age, nor to attain *jhāna* (meditative absorption). This was something that the revivers of the Forest Tradition refused to accept. It was also one of the reasons for which they were deemed, by the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the time, to be mavericks and trouble-makers, and it lies behind the obvious distance many of them (Ajahn Chah included) kept from the majority of 'study' monks of their own Theravāda lineage - as well as their refrain that you don't get wisdom from the books.

One might find such sentiments presumptuous or arrogant, unless it is appreciated that the interpretations of scholars were leading Buddhism into a black hole. Thai Forest monastics had the determination to focus on the lifestyle and on personal experience rather than on book study (especially the commentaries). In short, it was just the kind of situation that made the spiritual landscape ripe for renewal, and it was out of this fertile ground that the revival of the Forest Tradition emerged.

AJAHN MUN

The Thai Forest Tradition would not exist as it does today were it not for the influence of one particular great master, Ajahn Mun. Venerable Ajahn Mun Bhuridatta was born in Ubon Province in the 1870s. After his ordination as a bhikkhu he sought out Ven. Ajahn Sao, one of the rare local forest monks, and asked him to teach him meditation; he had also recognized that a rigorous adherence to the monastic discipline would be crucial to his spiritual progress.

Though both of these elements (i.e. meditation and strict discipline) might seem unremarkable from the vantage point of the present day, at that time monastic discipline had grown extremely lax throughout the region and meditation was looked upon with great suspicion. In time Ajahn Mun successfully explained and demonstrated the usefulness of meditation and became an exemplar of a much higher standard of conduct for the monastic community.

He became the most highly regarded of spiritual teachers in his country and almost all of the most accomplished and revered meditation masters of the 20th century in Thailand were either his direct disciples or were deeply influenced by him. Ajahn Chah was among them.

AJAHN CHAH

Ajahn Chah was born in a village in Ubon Province, North-East Thailand. At the age of nine he went to live in the local monastery. He was ordained as a novice, and at the age of twenty took higher ordination. He studied basic Dhamma, the Discipline and other scriptures, and later became a wandering *tudong*¹ bhikkhu. He travelled for a number of years in the style of an ascetic bhikkhu, sleeping in forests, caves and cremation grounds, and spent a short but enlightening period with Ajahn Mun himself.

In 1954 he was invited to settle in a forest near Bahn Gor, the village of his birth. The forest was uninhabited and known as a place of cobras, tigers and ghosts. More and more bhikkhus, nuns and lay-people came to hear his teachings and stay on to practise with him, and as time went by, a large monastery formed and was given the name Wat Pah Pong. There are now disciples of Ajahn Chah living, practising meditation and teaching in more

than 300 mountain and forest branch monasteries throughout Thailand and the West.

Although Ajahn Chah passed away in 1992, the training that he established is still carried on at Wat Pah Pong and its branches. There is usually group meditation twice a day and sometimes a talk by the senior teacher, but the heart of the meditation is the way of life. The monastics do manual work, dye and sew their own robes, make most of their own requisites and keep the monastery buildings and grounds in immaculate shape. They live extremely simply, following the ascetic precepts of eating once a day from the alms bowl and limiting their possessions and robes. Scattered throughout the forest are individual huts where bhikkhus and nuns live and meditate in solitude, and where they practise walking meditation on cleared paths under the trees.

In some of the monasteries in the West, and a few in Thailand, the physical location of the centre dictates that there might be some small variations to this style - for instance, the monastery in Switzerland is situated in a old wooden hotel building at the edge of a mountain village - however, regardless of such differences, the same spirit of simplicity, quietude and scrupulosity sets the abiding tone. Discipline is maintained strictly, enabling one to lead a simple and pure life in a harmoniously regulated community where virtue, meditation and understanding may be skilfully and continuously cultivated.

Along with monastic life as it is lived within the bounds of fixed locations, the practice of *tudong* - wandering on foot through the countryside, on pilgrimage or in search of quiet places for solitary retreat - is still considered a central part of spiritual training. Even though the forests have been disappearing rapidly throughout Thailand, and the tigers and other wild creatures so often encountered during such *tudong* journeys in the past have been depleted almost to the point of extinction, it has still been possible for this way of life and practice to continue. Indeed, not only has this practice of wandering on foot been maintained by Ajahn Chah, his disciples and many other forest monastics in Thailand; it has also been sustained by his monks and nuns in many countries of the West. In these situations the strict standards of conduct are still maintained: living only on almsfood freely offered by local people, eating only between dawn and noon, not carrying or using money, sleeping wherever shelter can be found. Wisdom is a way of living and being, and Ajahn Chah endeavoured to preserve the simple monastic lifestyle in all its dimensions, in order that people may study and practise Dhamma in the present day.

AJAHN CHAH'S TEACHING OF WESTERNERS

From the beginning Ajahn Chah chose not to give any special treatment to the *farang* (Western) monks who came to study with him, but to let them adapt to

the climate, food and culture as best they could, and use the experience of discomfort for the development of wisdom and patient endurance.

In 1975 Wat Pah Nanachat (the International Forest Monastery) was established near Wat Pah Pong as a place for Westerners to practise. The people of Bung Wai village had been long-standing disciples of Ajahn Chah and asked him if the foreign monks could settle there and start a new monastery. Then in 1976 Ajahn Sumedho was invited by a group in London to come and establish a Theravādan monastery in England. Ajahn Chah came over the following year and left Ajahn Sumedho and a small group of monastics at the Hampstead Buddhist Vihāra, a town house on a busy street in North London. Within a few years they had moved to the country and several different branch monasteries had been established. Other monasteries were set up in France, Australia, New Zealand, Switzerland, Italy, Canada and the U.S.A. Ajahn Chah himself travelled twice to Europe and North America, in 1977 and 1979.

He once said that Buddhism in Thailand was like an old tree that had formerly been vigorous and abundant; now it was so aged that it could only produce a few fruits and they were small and bitter. Buddhism in the West he likened in contrast to a young sapling, full of youthful energy and the potential for growth, but needing proper care and support for its development.

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

All the Teachings can be said to derive from an essential matrix of insight: *The Setting in Motion of the Wheel of Truth (Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, SN 56.11)*. In this brief discourse the Buddha speaks about the nature of the Middle Way and the Four Noble Truths. It takes only twenty minutes to recite, and the structures and forms he used to express this teaching were familiar to people in his time.

The Four Noble Truths are formulated like a medical diagnosis in the *ayurvedic*² tradition:

1. the symptom
2. the cause
3. the prognosis
4. the cure

The First Truth is the ‘symptom’. There is *dukkha* - we experience incompleteness, dissatisfaction or suffering. There might be periods of a coarse or even a transcendent happiness, but there are also feelings of

discontent which can vary from extreme anguish to the faintest sense that some blissful feeling we are experiencing will not last. All of this comes under the heading of '*dukkha*'. This First Truth is often wrongly understood as: 'Reality in every dimension is *dukkha*'. That's not what is meant here. If it were, there would be no hope of liberation for anyone, and to realize the truth of the way things are would not result in abiding peace and happiness. These are noble truths in the sense that they are relative truths; what makes them noble is that, when they are understood, they lead us to a realization of the Ultimate.

The Second Noble Truth is the 'cause'. Self-centred craving, *tanhā* in Pāli means 'thirst'. This craving, this grasping, is the cause of *dukkha*. There are many subtle dimensions to it: craving for sense-pleasure; craving to become something or craving to be identified as something; it can also be craving not to be, the desire to disappear, to be annihilated, the desire to get rid of.

The Third Truth is the 'prognosis'. Cessation: *dukkha-nirodha*. The experience of *dukkha*, of incompleteness, can fade away, can be transcended. It can end. *Dukkha* is not an absolute reality, it's just a temporary experience from which the heart can be liberated.

The Fourth Noble Truth is the 'cure'. It is the Path; it is how we get from the Second Truth to the Third, from the causation of *dukkha* to the ending of it. The cure is the Eightfold Path: virtue, concentration and wisdom.

THE LAW OF KAMMA

The Buddha's insight into the nature of Reality led him to see that this is a moral universe: good actions reap pleasant results, harmful acts reap painful results. The results may come soon after the act or at some remote time in the future, but an effect which matches the cause will necessarily follow. The key element of *kamma* is intention. As the Buddha expresses it in the opening verses of the Dhammapada:

'Mind is the forerunner of all things: think and act with a corrupt heart and sorrow will follow one as surely as the cart follows the ox that pulls it.'

'Mind is the forerunner of all things: think and act with a pure heart and happiness will follow one as surely as one's never-departing shadow.'

(*Dhp* 1-2)

This understanding is something that one comes to recognize through experience, and reference to it will be found throughout the Dhamma talks in these pages. When Ajahn Chah encountered westerners who said that they

didn't believe in *kamma* as he described it, rather than dismissing it as wrong view, he was interested that they could look at things in such a different way - he would ask them to describe how they saw things working, and then take the conversation from there. The story is widely circulated that when a young Western monk told Ajahn Chah he couldn't go along with the teachings on rebirth, Ajahn Chah answered him by saying that that didn't have to be a problem, but to come back in five years to talk about it again.

EVERYTHING IS UNCERTAIN

Insight can truly be said to have dawned when three qualities have been seen and known through direct experience. These are *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā* - impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and 'not-self'. We recognize that everything is changing, nothing can be permanently satisfying or dependable, and nothing can truly be said to be ours, or absolutely who and what we are. Ajahn Chah stressed that the contemplation of *anicca* is the gateway to wisdom. As he puts it in the talk 'Still, Flowing Water'; 'Whoever sees the uncertainty of things sees the unchanging reality of them ... If you know *anicca*, uncertainty, you will let go of things and not grasp onto them.'

It is a characteristic of Ajahn Chah's teaching that he used the less familiar rendition of 'uncertainty' (*my naer* in Thai) for *anicca*. While 'impermanence' can have a more abstract or technical tone to it, 'uncertainty' better describes the feeling in the heart when one is faced with that quality of change.

CHOICE OF EXPRESSION: 'YES' OR 'NO'

A characteristic of the Theravāda teachings is that the Truth and the way leading to it are often indicated by talking about what they are *not* rather than what they *are*.

Readers have often mistaken this for a nihilistic view of life, and if one comes from a culture committed to expressions of life-affirmation, it's easy to see how the mistake could be made.

The Buddha realized that the mere declaration of the Truth did not necessarily arouse faith, and might not be effective in communicating it to others either, so he adopted a much more analytical method (*vibhajjavāda* in Pāli) and in doing so composed the formula of the Four Noble Truths. This analytical method through negation is most clearly seen in the Buddha's second discourse (*Anattalakkhana Sutta*, SN 22.59), where it is shown how a 'self' cannot be found in relation to any of the factors of body or mind, therefore: 'The wise noble disciple becomes dispassionate towards the body, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness.' Thus the heart is liberated.

Once we let go of what we're not, the nature of what is Real becomes apparent. And as that Reality is beyond description, it is most appropriate, and least misleading, to leave it undescribed - this is the essence of the 'way of negation'.

Ajahn Chah avoided talking about levels of attainment and levels of meditative absorption in order to counter spiritual materialism (the gaining mind, competitiveness and jealousy) and to keep people focused on the Path. Having said that, he was also ready to speak about Ultimate Reality if required. The talks 'Toward the Unconditioned,' 'Transcendence' and 'No Abiding' are examples of this. If, however, a person insisted on asking about transcendent qualities and it was clear that their understanding was not yet developed (as in the dialogue 'What is Contemplation'), Ajahn Chah might well respond, as he does there, 'It isn't anything and we don't call it anything that's all there is to it! Be finished with all of it', (literally: 'If there is anything there, then just throw it to the dogs!')

RIGHT VIEW AND VIRTUE

Ajahn Chah frequently said that his experience had shown him that all spiritual progress depended upon Right View and on purity of conduct. Of Right View the Buddha once said: 'Just as the glowing of the dawn sky foretells the rising of the sun, so too is Right View the forerunner of all wholesome states' (AN 10.121). To establish Right View means firstly that one has a trustworthy map of the terrain of the mind and the world - an appreciation of the law of *kamma*, particularly - and secondly it means that one sees experience in the light of the Four Noble Truths and is thus turning that flow of perceptions, thoughts and moods into fuel for insight. The four points become the quarters of the compass by which we orient our understanding and thus guide our actions and intentions.

Ajahn Chah saw *sīla* (virtue) as the great protector of the heart and encouraged a sincere commitment to the Precepts by all those who were serious about their search for happiness and a skilfully lived life - whether these were the Five Precepts of the householder or the Eight, Ten or 227 of the various levels of the monastic community. Virtuous action and speech, *sīla*, brings the heart directly into accord with Dhamma and thus becomes the foundation for concentration, insight and, finally, liberation.

In many ways *sīla* is the external corollary to the internal quality of Right View and there is a reciprocal relationship between them: if we understand causality and see the relationship between craving and *dukkha*, then certainly our actions are more likely to be harmonious and restrained; similarly, if our actions and speech are respectful, honest and non-violent, we create the causes of peace within us and it will be much easier for us to see the laws

governing the mind and its workings, and Right View will develop more easily.

One particular outcome of this relationship of which Ajahn Chah spoke regularly, as in the talk 'Convention and Liberation', is the intrinsic emptiness of all conventions (e.g. money, monasticism, social customs), but the simultaneous need to respect them fully. This might sound paradoxical, but he saw the Middle Way as synonymous with the resolution of this kind of conundrum. As he once said, 'The Dhamma is all about letting go; the monastic discipline is all about holding on; when you realize how those two function together, you will be fine.' If we cling to conventions we become burdened and limited by them, but if we try to defy them or negate them we find ourselves lost, conflicted and bewildered. He saw that with the right attitude, both aspects could be respected and in a way that was natural and freeing rather than forced or compromised.

It was probably due to his own profound insights in this area that he was able to be both extraordinarily orthodox and austere as a Buddhist monk, yet utterly relaxed and unfettered by any of the rules he observed. To many who met him he seemed the happiest man in the world - a fact perhaps ironic about someone who had never had sex in his life, had no money, never listened to music, was regularly available to people eighteen to twenty hours a day, slept on a thin grass mat, had a diabetic condition and various forms of malaria, and who was delighted by the fact that Wat Pah Pong had the reputation of having 'the worst food in the world.'

METHODS OF TRAINING

The collection of Ajahn Chah's talks presented here was transcribed from tapes made more often than not in informal dialogues, where the flow of teaching and to whom it was directed were extremely unpredictable. Some of the talks were given in such spontaneous gatherings, others on more formal occasions, such as after the recitation of the bhikkhus' rules, or to the whole assembly of laity and monastics on the weekly lunar observance night. However, whether they were of the former or the latter kind, Ajahn Chah never planned anything. Not one single part of the Dhamma teachings printed here was plotted out before he started speaking. This was an important principle, he felt, as the job of the teacher was to get out of the way and let the Dhamma arise according to the needs of the moment - if it's not alive to the present, it's not Dhamma, he would say. This style of teaching was not unique to Ajahn Chah, but is that espoused throughout the Thai Forest Tradition.

Ajahn Chah trained his students in many ways, the majority of the learning process occurring through situational teaching. He knew that, for the heart to learn any aspect of the Teaching truly and be transformed by it, the lesson had

to be absorbed by experience, not intellectually alone. Thus he employed aspects of the monastic routine, communal living and the *tudong* life as ways to teach: community work projects, learning to recite the rules, helping with the daily chores, random changes in the schedule - these were all used as a forum in which to investigate the arising of *dukkha* and the way leading to its cessation.

He encouraged the attitude of being ready to learn from everything, as he describes in the talk 'Dhamma Nature'. He would emphasize that we are our own teachers: if we are wise, every personal problem, event and aspect of nature will instruct us; if we are foolish, not even having the Buddha before us explaining everything would make any real impression.

This insight became clear in the way he related to people's questions - rather than answering the question in its own terms, he responded more to where the questioner was coming from. Often when asked something he would appear to receive the question, gently take it to pieces and then hand the bits back to those who asked; they would then see for themselves how it was put together. To their surprise he had guided them in such a way that they had answered their own question. When asked how it was that he could do this so often, he replied 'If the person did not already know the answer they could not have posed the question in the first place.'

Other key attitudes that he encouraged and which can be found in the teachings here are, firstly, the need to cultivate a profound sense of urgency in meditation practice and, secondly, to use the training environment to develop patient endurance. This latter quality is seen in the forest life as almost synonymous with spiritual training, but has not otherwise received a great deal of attention in spiritual circles of the 'quick fix' culture of the West.

When the Buddha was giving his very first instructions on monastic discipline, to a spontaneous gathering of 1,250 of his enlightened disciples at the Bamboo Grove, his first words were: 'Patient endurance is the supreme practice for freeing the heart from unwholesome states.' (Dhp 183-85). So when someone would come to Ajahn Chah with a tale of woe, of how her husband was drinking and the rice crop looked bad this year, his first response would often be: 'Can you endure it?' This was said not as some kind of macho challenge, but more as a means of pointing to the fact that the way beyond suffering is neither to run away from it, wallow in it or even grit one's teeth and get through on will alone - no, the encouragement of patient endurance is to hold steady in the midst of difficulty, truly apprehend and digest the experience of *dukkha*, understand its causes and let them go.

TEACHING THE LAITY AND TEACHING MONASTICS

There were many occasions when Ajahn Chah's teachings were as applicable to laypeople as to monastics, but there were also many instances when they were not. The three volumes of this present collection Daily Life Practice, Formal Practice and Renunciant Practice - have been arranged to reflect these differences of focus and applicability. Even though the teachings have already been divided up in this way, this is still an important factor to bear in mind when the reader is going through the talks contained here not to be aware of such differences could be confusing. For example, the talk 'Making the Heart Good' is aimed at a lay audience - a group of people who have come to visit Wat Pah Pong to *tam boon*, to make offerings to the monastery both to support the community there and to make some good *kamma* for themselves. On the other hand, a talk like 'The Flood of Sensuality' would only be given to the monastics, in that instance just to the monks and male novices.

This distinction was not made because of certain teachings being 'secret' or higher in some respect; rather it was through the need to speak in ways that would be appropriate and useful to particular audiences. Unlike the monastic, lay practitioners have a different range of concerns and influences in their daily life: trying to find time for formal meditation practice, maintaining an income, living with a spouse. And most particularly, the lay community has not undertaken the vows of the renunciant life - a lay student may keep the Five Precepts, whereas the monastics would be keeping the Eight, Ten or 227 Precepts of the various levels of ordination.

When teaching monastics alone, Ajahn Chah's focus is much more specifically on using the renunciant way of life as the key method of training; the instruction therefore concerns itself with the hurdles, pitfalls and glories that that way of life might bring. Since the average age of the monks' community in a monastery in Thailand is usually around 25 to 30, and with the strict precepts around celibacy, there was also a natural need for Ajahn Chah to skilfully guide the restless and sexual energy that his monks would often experience. When it was well-directed, the individuals would be able to contain and employ that same energy, and transform it to help develop concentration and insight.

The tone of some of the talks to monastics will in certain instances also be seen to be considerably more directly confrontational than those given to the lay community, for example, 'Dhamma Fighting'. This manner of expression represents something of the 'take no prisoners' style which is characteristic of many of the teachers of the Thai Forest Tradition. It is a way of speaking that is intended to rouse the 'warrior heart': an attitude toward spiritual practice which enables one to be ready to endure all hardships and to be wise, patient and faithful, regardless of how difficult things get.

At times this way of teaching may seem overly aggressive or combative in its tone; the reader should therefore bear in mind that the spirit behind such language is the endeavour to encourage the practitioner, gladden the heart and provide supportive strength when dealing with the multifarious challenges to freedom from greed, hatred and delusion. As Ajahn Chah once said: ‘All those who seriously engage in spiritual practice should expect to experience a great deal of friction and difficulty.’ The heart is being trained to go against the current of self-centred habits, so it’s quite natural for it to be buffeted around somewhat.

As a final note on this aspect of Ajahn Chah’s teachings, particularly those one might term ‘higher’ or ‘transcendent’, it is significant that he didn’t exclude the laity from any instruction of this nature. If he felt a group of people was ready for the highest levels of teaching, he would impart them freely and openly, whether it was to laypeople or to monastics, as in, for example, ‘Toward the Unconditioned’ or ‘Still, Flowing Water’ where he states: ‘People these days study away, looking for good and evil. But that which is beyond good and evil they know nothing of.’ Like the Buddha, he never employed the ‘teacher’s closed fist’, and made his choices of what to teach solely on the basis of what would be useful to his listeners, not on their number of precepts and their religious affiliation or lack of one.

COUNTERING SUPERSTITION

Ajahn Chah was well known for his keenness to dispel superstition from Buddhist practice in Thailand. He criticized the use of ‘magic’ charms, amulets and fortune-telling. He rarely spoke about past or future lives, other realms, visions or psychic experiences. Anyone who came to him asking for the next winning lottery number (a very common reason why some people go to visit famous Ajahns) would generally get very short shrift. He saw that the Dhamma itself was the most priceless jewel, which could provide genuine protection and security in life, and yet it was continually overlooked for the sake of the promise of minor improvements to *samsāra*.

He emphasized the usefulness and practicality of Buddhist practice, countering the common belief that Dhamma was too high or abstruse for the common person. His criticisms were not just aimed to break down childish dependencies on good luck and magical charms; rather he wanted people to invest in something that would truly serve them in their lives.

In the light of this life-long effort, there was also an ironic twist of circumstance that accompanied his funeral in 1993. He passed away on 16 January 1992 and they held the funeral exactly a year later; the memorial stupa had 16 pillars, was 32 metres high, and had foundations 16 metres deep - consequently a huge number of people in Ubon Province bought lottery

tickets with ones and sixes together. The next day the headlines in the local paper proclaimed: LUANG POR CHAH'S LAST GIFT TO HIS DISCIPLES - the 16s had cleaned up and a couple of local bookmakers had even been bankrupted.

HUMOUR

That last story brings us to a final quality of Ajahn Chah's teaching style. He was an amazingly quick-witted man and a natural performer. Although he could be very cool and forbidding, or sensitive and gentle in his way of expression, he also used a high degree of humour in his teaching. He had away of employing wit to work his way into the hearts of his listeners, not just to amuse but to help convey truths that would otherwise not be received so easily.

His sense of humour and skilful eye for the tragi-comic absurdities of life enabled people to see situations in such a way that they could laugh at themselves and be guided to a wiser outlook. This might be in matters of conduct, such as a famous display he once gave of the many *wrong* ways to carry a monk's bag: slung over the back, looped round the neck, grabbed in the fist, scraped along the ground ... Or it might be in terms of some painful personal struggle. One time a young bhikkhu came to him very downcast. He had seen the sorrows of the world and the horror of beings' entrapment in birth and death, and had realized that 'I'll never be able to laugh again it's all so sad and painful.' Within forty-five minutes, via a graphic tale about a youthful squirrel repeatedly attempting and falling short in its efforts to learn tree-climbing, the monk was rolling on the floor clutching his sides, tears pouring down his face as he was convulsed with the laughter that he had thought would never return.

LAST YEARS

During the rains retreat of 1981 Ajahn Chah became seriously ill, with what was apparently some form of stroke. His health had been shaky for the previous few years, with dizzy spells and diabetic problems, and now it went down with a crash. Over the next few months he received various kinds of treatment, including a couple of operations, but nothing helped. The slide continued until by the middle of the following year he was paralysed but for some slight movement in one hand, and he had lost the power of speech. He could still blink his eyes.

He remained in this state for the next ten years, his few areas of control diminishing slowly until by the end all voluntary movement was lost to him. During this time it was often said that he was still teaching his students: hadn't he reiterated endlessly that the body is of the nature to sicken and

decay, and that it is not under personal control? As he put it somewhat prophetically in 'Why Are We Here?', a talk given just before his health collapsed: 'People come to visit, but I can't really receive them like I used to because my voice has just about had it; my breath is just about gone. You can count it a blessing that there's still this body sitting here for you all to see now. Soon you won't see it. The breath will be finished; the voice will be gone. They will fare in accordance with supporting factors, like all compounded things.'

So here was a prime object lesson for all his students - neither a great master like Ajahn Chah nor even the Buddha himself could escape the inexorable laws of nature. The task, as always, was to find peace and freedom by not identifying with the changing forms.

During this time, despite his severe limitations, he occasionally managed to teach in ways other than just being an example of the uncertain processes of life and by giving opportunity for his monks and novices to offer their support through nursing care. The bhikkhus used to work in shifts, three or four at a time, to look after Ajahn Chah's physical needs, as he required attention twenty-four hours a day. On one particular shift two monks got into an argument, quite forgetting (as often happens around paralyzed or comatose people) that the other occupant of the room might be fully cognizant of what was going on. Had Ajahn Chah been fully active, it would have been unthinkable that they would have got into such a spat in front of him.

As the words got more heated an agitated movement began in the bed across the room. Suddenly Ajahn Chah coughed violently and, according to reports, sent a sizeable gob of phlegm shooting across the intervening space, passing between the two protagonists and smacking into the wall right beside them. The teaching was duly received and the argument came to an abrupt and embarrassed conclusion.

During the course of his illness the life of the monasteries continued much as before. The Master's being both there yet not there served in a strange way to help the community to adapt to communal decision-making and to the concept of life without their beloved teacher at the centre of everything. After such a great elder passes away it is not uncommon for things to disintegrate rapidly and for all his students to go their own way, the teacher's legacy vanishing within a generation or two. It is perhaps a testimony to how well Ajahn Chah trained people to be self-reliant that whereas at the time of his falling sick there were about 75 branch monasteries, this had increased to well over 100 by the time he passed away, and has now grown to more than 300, in Thailand and around the world.

After he passed away, his monastic community set about arranging his

funeral. In keeping with the spirit of his life and teachings, the funeral was not to be just a ceremony but also a time for hearing and practising Dhamma. It was held over ten days with several periods of group meditation and instructional talks each day, these being given by many of the most accomplished Dhamma teachers in the country. There were about 6,000 monks, 1,000 nuns and just over 10,000 laypeople camped in the forest for the 10 days. Beside them, an estimated 1,000,000 people came passed through the monastery during the practice period; 400,000, including the king and queen and the prime minister of Thailand, who came on the day of the cremation itself.

Again, in the spirit of the standards Ajahn Chah espoused throughout his teaching career, throughout this entire session, not one penny was charged for anything: food was supplied for everyone through forty-two free food kitchens, run and stocked by many of the branch monasteries; over £120,000 worth of free Dhamma books were passed out; bottled water was provided by the gallon through a local firm, and the local bus company and other nearby lorry owners ferried out the thousands of monks each morning to go on almsround through villages and towns in the area. It was a grand festival of generosity and a fitting way to bid farewell to the great man.

It is in the same spirit of generosity that this present edition of Ajahn Chah's Dhamma talks has been compiled. This compilation, 'The Collected Teachings of Ajahn Chah', comprises most of Ajahn Chah's talks which have been previously published for free distribution in English.

May these teachings provide nourishing contemplation for seekers of the Way and help to establish a heart which is awake, pure and peaceful.

Ajahn Amaro February 2011

¹ tudong: The practice of wandering in the country and living on almsfood.

² Ayurvedic medicine is a system of traditional medicine native to India.

A Note On The Text

THIS IS the first of three volumes of The Collected Teachings of Ajahn Chah. These have all been transcribed, translated and edited from talks originally given in the Thai or Laotian language by Ajahn Chah. Some were given to gatherings of lay followers; many, perhaps most, were offered to groups of mainly male monastics living with him in Thailand. These factors inevitably affect not just the content but also the tone and emphasis of the original teachings. Readers are encouraged to bear these circumstances in mind in order to appreciate fully the range and applicability and the full significance of these Dhamma teachings. In a way, Western lay readers will need to make their own inner translation as they go along - finding their own equivalents for all those water buffalo analogies and the context of an ascetic monastic life in the forest - but this kind of engaged reflection, contemplating how these words apply within the ambit of our own lives, is exactly the kind of relationship to the teachings that Ajahn Chah encouraged.

Firstly, amongst these influencing factors there are the inherent difficulties in translating from Thai to English, from a tonal Asian language deeply influenced by Buddhism to a European language with its own cultural resonances. Additionally, several different translators have worked on the teachings gathered in these volumes. The differing nationalities and backgrounds of these translators inevitably mean that there are variations in tone, style and vocabulary between chapters.

Secondly, during the thirty-year period during which these translations were made, Buddhist culture in the West has also greatly changed. Whereas earlier translators perhaps felt that many Buddhist concepts needed to be translated into more familiar Western terms, there is nowadays a greater awareness of the Buddhist worldview; for example, terms like 'kamma' and 'nibbāna' are now part of accepted English vocabulary. The talks gathered in these volumes therefore show a range of ways of translating Buddhist terms and concepts.

Thirdly, the monastic Buddhist context means that Thai and Pāli words with technical meanings were a regular and accepted part of the vernacular teaching style. The various translators have each made their own decisions about how to render such technical terms. For example, in the Thai language the same word can mean either 'heart' or 'mind', and translators have had to exercise their own judgement as to how to render it into English. Readers should bear this in mind if they encounter English words used in ways that don't seem quite natural, or seem inconsistent between the various talks. More often than not non-English words are explained either in the context of the talk or with a footnote. In addition, a glossary of the more common terms

and a list of further resources can be found at the end of the book.

We trust that in our efforts to render oral instruction in a written form we have not obscured the intentions of the teacher. Inevitably some compromises have been made, as different translators have attempted to strike a balance between literal and liberal renderings. For this compilation we have reedited some of the translations for the sake of standardizing terms and style. However we have kept this to a minimum. Further editions of these works might attempt a greater degree of standardization.

Finally, particularly in Volume Three, Renunciant Practice, Ajahn Chah's talks were given in a context where the audience was mainly engaged in a celibate renunciant lifestyle. This circumstance inevitably colours much of the way the Dhamma is presented there. Ajahn Chah also very often talked only to men. This fact explains the constant use of exclusively male pronouns in many of these talks. Although the preservation of such language here may appear to some as an obstruction, it seemed an inappropriate liberty to edit it out. Readers may thus again at times have to make an internal translation of their own, or other leaps of the imagination, in order to illuminate the relevance of those teachings to their own lives.

Ajahn Chah would have been teaching in small halls, dimly lit by kerosine lamps, surrounded by the assembly of monks. The teachings often took the form of exhortations given at the end of the fortnightly recitation of the *Pātimokkha*, the monastic code of discipline. These teachings were thus explicitly directed at monastic residents, so the lay readers of these teachings should remember that they are as much encountering a renunciate style of Buddhist practice as a set of Dhamma teachings.

The three headings, Daily Life Practice, Formal Practice and Renunciant Practice, under which these talks have been organized should not be taken too literally. Within each talk there is a large degree of overlap, accordingly it is not necessary for them to be read in the order in which they have been presented.

The preparation and presentation of this compilation has been a team effort benefiting from the time and skills of many proof-readers, technicians and designers. Particular mention should be made of the offerings of two of the original translators, Paul Breiter and Bruce Evans. We are indebted to all those contributors whose time and effort have brought this project to fruition.

We sincerely hope that with all these perspectives taken to heart, the words contained in these volumes will serve every reader well and be a condition for the realization of Nibbāna. It was with this same intention that Ajahn Chah spoke so much for so many years. May these intentions ripen in the reader's

life and lead to complete peace and freedom.

The compilers

The Middle Way Within

The teaching of Buddhism is about giving up evil and practising good. Then, when evil is given up and goodness is established, we must let go of both good and evil. We have already heard enough about wholesome and unwholesome conditions to understand something about them, so I would like to talk about the Middle Way, that is, the path to transcend both of those things.

All the Dhamma talks and teachings of the Buddha have one aim - to show the way out of suffering to those who have not yet escaped. The teachings are for the purpose of giving us the right understanding. If we don't understand rightly, then we can't arrive at peace.

When all the Buddhas became enlightened and gave their first teachings, they pointed out these two extremes - indulgence in pleasure and indulgence in pain. These two types of infatuation are the opposite poles between which those who indulge in sense pleasures must fluctuate, never arriving at peace. They are the paths which spin around in samsāra.

The Enlightened One observed that all beings are stuck in these two extremes, never seeing the Middle Way of Dhamma, so he pointed them out in order to show the penalty involved in both. Because we are still stuck, because we are still wanting, we live repeatedly under their sway. The Buddha declared that these two ways are the ways of intoxication, they are not the ways of a meditator, not the ways to peace. These ways are indulgence in pleasure and indulgence in pain, or, to put it simply, the way of slackness and the way of tension.

If you investigate within, moment by moment, you will see that the tense way is anger, the way of sorrow. Going this way there is only difficulty and distress. If you've transcended indulgence in pleasure it means you've transcended happiness. Happiness and unhappiness, are not peaceful states. The Buddha taught to let go of both of them. This is right practice. This is the Middle Way.

These words, 'the Middle Way', do not refer to our body and speech, they refer to the mind. When a mental impression which we don't like arises, it affects the mind and there is confusion. When the mind is confused, when it's 'shaken up', this is not the right way. When a mental impression arises which we like, the mind goes to indulgence in pleasure - that's not the way either.

We people don't want suffering, we want happiness. But in fact happiness is just a refined form of suffering. Suffering itself is the coarse form. You can compare it to a snake. The head of the snake is unhappiness, the tail of the

snake is happiness. The head of the snake is really dangerous, it has poisonous fangs. If you touch it, the snake will bite straight away. But never mind the head; even if you go and hold onto the tail, it will turn around and bite you just the same, because both the head and the tail belong to the one snake.

In the same way, both happiness and unhappiness, or pleasure and sadness, arise from the same parent - wanting. So when you're happy the mind isn't peaceful. It really isn't! For instance, when we get the things we like, such as wealth, prestige, praise or happiness, we become pleased as a result. But the mind still harbours some uneasiness because we're afraid of losing it. That very fear isn't a peaceful state. Later on we may actually lose that thing and then we really suffer.

Thus, if you aren't aware, even if you're happy, suffering is imminent. It's just the same as grabbing the snake's tail - if you don't let go it will bite. So whether it's the snake's tail or its head, that is, wholesome or unwholesome conditions, they're all just characteristics of the 'Wheel of Existence', of endless change.

The Buddha established morality, concentration and wisdom as the path to peace, the way to enlightenment. But in truth these things are not the essence of Buddhism. They are merely the path. The Buddha called them *magga*, which means 'path'. The essence of Buddhism is peace, and that peace arises from truly knowing the nature of all things. If we investigate closely, we can see that peace is neither happiness nor unhappiness. Neither of these is the truth.

The human mind, the mind which the Buddha exhorted us to know and investigate, is something we can only know by its activity. The true 'original mind' has nothing to measure it by, there's nothing you can know it by. In its natural state it is unshaken, unmoving. When happiness arises all that happens is that this mind gets lost in a mental impression; there is movement. When the mind moves like this, clinging and attachment to those things come into being.

The Buddha has already laid down the path of practice in its entirety, but we have not yet practised, or if we have, we've practised only in speech. Our minds and our speech are not yet in harmony, we just indulge in empty talk. But the basis of Buddhism is not something that can be talked about or guessed at. The real basis of Buddhism is full knowledge of the truth of reality. If one knows this truth then no teaching is necessary. If one doesn't know, even if he listens to the teaching, he doesn't really hear. This is why the Buddha said, 'The Enlightened One only points the way.' He can't do the practice for you, because the truth is something you can not put into words or

give away.

All the teachings are merely similes and comparisons, means to help the mind see the truth. If we haven't seen the truth we must suffer. For example, we commonly use the term '*sankhārā*' when referring to the body. Anybody can say it, but in fact we have problems simply because we don't know the truth of these *sankhārā*, and thus cling to them. Because we don't know the truth of the body, we suffer.

Here is an example. Suppose one morning you're walking to work and a man yells abuse and insults at you from across the street. As soon as you hear this abuse your mind changes from its usual state. You don't feel so good, you feel angry and hurt. That man walks around abusing you night and day. Whenever you hear the abuse, you get angry, and even when you return home you're still angry because you feel vindictive, you want to get even.

A few days later another man comes to your house and calls out, 'Hey! That man who abused you the other day, he's mad, he's crazy! Has been for years! He abuses everybody like that. Nobody takes any notice of anything he says.' As soon as you hear this you are suddenly relieved. That anger and hurt that you've pent up within you all these days melts away completely. Why? Because you know the truth of the matter now. Before, you didn't know, you thought that man was normal, so you were angry at him. Thinking like that caused you to suffer. As soon as you find out the truth, everything changes: 'Oh, he's mad! That explains everything!'

When you understand this you feel fine, because you know for yourself. Having known, then you can let go. If you don't know the truth you cling right there. When you thought that man who abused you was normal you could have killed him. But when you find out the truth, that he's mad, you feel much better. This is knowledge of the truth.

Someone who sees the Dhamma has a similar experience. When attachment, aversion and delusion disappear, they disappear in the same way. As long as we don't know these things we think, 'What can I do? I have so much greed and aversion.' This is not clear knowledge. It's just the same as when we thought the madman was sane. When we finally see that he was mad all along we're relieved of worry. No one could show you this. Only when the mind sees for itself can it uproot and relinquish attachment.

It's the same with this body which we call '*sankhārā*'. Although the Buddha has already explained that the body is not substantial or a real being as such, we still don't agree, we stubbornly cling to it. If the body could talk, it would be telling us all day long, 'You're not my owner, you know.' Actually it's telling us all the time, but it's Dhamma language, so we're unable to

understand it.

For instance, the sense organs of eye, ear, nose, tongue and body are continually changing, but I've never seen them ask permission from us even once! Like when we have a headache or a stomach ache - the body never asks permission first, it just goes right ahead, following its natural course. This shows that the body doesn't allow anyone to be its owner, it doesn't have an owner. The Buddha described it as an object void of substance.

We don't understand the Dhamma and so we don't understand these '*sankhārā*'; we take them to be ourselves, as belonging to us or belonging to others. This gives rise to clinging. When clinging arises, 'becoming' follows. Once becoming arises, then there is birth. Once there is birth, then old age, sickness, death ... the whole mass of suffering arises.

This is the *paticcasamuppāda*. We say ignorance gives rise to volitional activities, they give rise to consciousness and so on. All these things are simply events in the mind. When we come into contact with something we don't like, if we don't have mindfulness, ignorance is there. Suffering arises straight away. But the mind passes through these changes so rapidly that we can't keep up with them. It's the same as when you fall from a tree. Before you know it - 'Thud!' - you've hit the ground. Actually you've passed many branches and twigs on the way, but you couldn't count them, you couldn't remember them as you passed them. You just fall, and then 'Thud!'

The *paticcasamuppāda* is the same as this. If we divide it up as it is in the scriptures, we say ignorance gives rise to volitional activities, volitional activities give rise to consciousness, consciousness gives rise to mind and matter, mind and matter give rise to the six sense bases, the sense bases give rise to sense contact, contact gives rise to feeling, feeling gives rise to wanting, wanting gives rise to clinging, clinging gives rise to becoming, becoming gives rise to birth, birth gives rise to old age, sickness, death, and all forms of sorrow. But in truth, when you come into contact with something you don't like, there's immediate suffering! That feeling of suffering is actually the result of the whole chain of the *paticcasamuppāda*. This is why the Buddha exhorted his disciples to investigate and know fully their own minds.

When people are born into the world they are without names - once born, we name them. This is convention. We give people names for the sake of convenience, to call each other by. The scriptures are the same. We separate everything with labels to make studying the reality convenient. In the same way, all things are simply *sankhārā*. Their original nature is merely that of compounded things. The Buddha said that they are impermanent, unsatisfactory and not-self. They are unstable. We don't understand this

firmly, our understanding is not straight, and so we have wrong view. This wrong view is that the *sankhārā* are ourselves, we are the *sankhārā*, or that happiness and unhappiness are ourselves, we are happiness and unhappiness. Seeing like this is not full, clear knowledge of the true nature of things. The truth is that we can't force all these things to follow our desires, they follow the way of nature.

Here is a simple comparison: suppose you go and sit in the middle of a freeway with the cars and trucks charging down at you. You can't get angry at the cars, shouting, 'Don't drive over here! Don't drive over here!' It's a freeway, you can't tell them that. So what can you do? You get off the road! The road is the place where cars run, if you don't want the cars to be there, you suffer.

It's the same with *sankhārā*. We say they disturb us, like when we sit in meditation and hear a sound. We think, 'Oh, that sound's bothering me.' If we understand that the sound bothers us then we suffer accordingly. If we investigate a little deeper, we will see that it's we who go out and disturb the sound! The sound is simply sound. If we understand like this then there's nothing more to it, we leave it be. We see that the sound is one thing, we are another. One who understands that the sound comes to disturb him is one who doesn't see himself. He really doesn't! Once you see yourself, then you're at ease. The sound is just sound, why should you go and grab it? You see that actually it was you who went out and disturbed the sound.

This is real knowledge of the truth. You see both sides, so you have peace. If you see only one side, there is suffering. Once you see both sides, then you follow the Middle Way. This is the right practice of the mind. This is what we call straightening out our understanding.

In the same way, the nature of all *sankhārā* is impermanence and death, but we want to grab them; we carry them about and covet them. We want them to be true. We want to find truth within the things that aren't true. Whenever someone sees like this and clings to the *sankhārā* as being himself, he suffers.

The practice of Dhamma is not dependent on being a monk, a novice or a layman; it depends on straightening out your understanding. If our understanding is correct, we arrive at peace. Whether you are ordained or not it's the same, every person has the chance to practise Dhamma, to contemplate it. We all contemplate the same thing. If you attain peace, it's all the same peace; it's the same path, with the same methods.

Therefore the Buddha didn't discriminate between laymen and monks, he taught all people to practise in order to know the truth of the *sankhārā*. When we know this truth, we let them go. If we know the truth there will be no more

becoming or birth. How is there no more birth? There is no way for birth to take place because we fully know the truth of *sankhārā*. If we fully know the truth, then there is peace. Having or not having, it's all the same. Gain and loss are one. The Buddha taught us to know this. This is peace; peace from happiness, unhappiness, gladness and sorrow.

We must see that there is no reason to be born. Born in what way? Born into gladness: when we get something we like we are glad over it. If there is no clinging to that gladness there is no birth. If there is clinging, this is called 'birth'. So if we get something, we aren't born into gladness. If we lose something, we aren't born into sorrow. This is the birthless and the deathless. Birth and death are both founded in clinging to and cherishing the *sankhārā*.

So the Buddha said: 'There is no more becoming for me, finished is the holy life, this is my last birth.' There! He knew the birthless and the deathless. This is what the Buddha constantly exhorted his disciples to know. This is the right practice. If you don't reach it, if you don't reach the Middle Way, then you won't transcend suffering.

The Peace Beyond

It's of great importance that we practise the Dhamma. If we don't practise, then all our knowledge is only superficial knowledge, just the outer shell of it. It's as if we have some sort of fruit but we haven't eaten it yet. Even though we have that fruit in our hand we get no benefit from it. Only through the actual eating of the fruit will we really know its taste.

The Buddha didn't praise those who merely believe others; he praised the person who knows within himself. Just as with that fruit, if we have tasted it already, we don't have to ask anyone else if it's sweet or sour. Our problems are over. Why are they over? Because we see according to the truth. One who has realized the Dhamma is like one who has realized the sweetness or sourness of the fruit. All doubts are ended right here.

When we talk about Dhamma, although we may say a lot, it can usually be brought down to four things. They are simply to know suffering, to know the cause of suffering, to know the end of suffering and to know the path of practice leading to the end of suffering.

This is all there is. All that we have experienced on the path of practice so far comes down to these four things. When we know these things, our problems are over.

Where are these four things born? They are born just within the body and the mind, nowhere else. So why is the teaching of the Buddha so detailed and extensive? This is in order to explain these things in a more refined way, to help us to see them.

When Siddhattha Gotama was born into the world, before he saw the Dhamma, he was an ordinary person just like us. When he knew what he had to know, that is, the truth of suffering, the cause, the end and the way leading to the end of suffering, he realized the Dhamma and became a perfectly enlightened Buddha.

When we realize the Dhamma, wherever we sit we know Dhamma, wherever we are we hear the Buddha's teaching. When we understand Dhamma, the Buddha is within our mind, the Dhamma is within our mind, and the practice leading to wisdom is within our own mind. Having the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha within our mind means that whether our actions are good or bad, we know clearly for ourselves their true nature.

That is how the Buddha discarded worldly opinions, praise and criticism. When people praised or criticized him he just accepted it for what it was. These two things are simply worldly conditions so he wasn't shaken by them.

Why not? Because he knew suffering. He knew that if he believed in that praise or criticism they would cause him to suffer.

When suffering arises it agitates us, we feel ill at ease. What is the cause of that suffering? It's because we don't know the truth; this is the cause. When the cause is present, then suffering arises. Once arisen we don't know how to stop it. The more we try to stop it, the more it comes on. We say, 'Don't criticize me,' or 'Don't blame me.' Trying to stop it like this, suffering really comes on, it won't stop.

So the Buddha taught that the way leading to the end of suffering is to make the Dhamma arise as a reality within our own minds. We become those who witness the Dhamma for themselves. If someone says we are good we don't get lost in it; they say we are no good and we don't forget ourselves. This way we can be free. 'Good' and 'evil' are just worldly dhammas, they are just states of mind. If we follow them our mind becomes the world, we just grope in the darkness and don't know the way out.

If it's like this then we have not yet mastered ourselves. We try to defeat others, but in doing so we only defeat ourselves; but if we have mastery over ourselves then we have mastery over all - over all mental formations, sights, sounds, smells, tastes and bodily feelings.

Now I'm talking about externals, they're like that, but the outside is reflected inside also. Some people only know the outside, they don't know the inside. Like when we say to 'see the body in the body'. Having seen the outer body is not enough, we must know the body within the body. Then, having investigated the mind, we should know the mind within the mind.

Why should we investigate the body? What is this 'body in the body'? When we say to know the mind, what is this 'mind'? If we don't know the mind then we don't know the things within the mind. This is to be someone who doesn't know suffering, doesn't know the cause, doesn't know the end and doesn't know the way leading to the end of suffering. The things which should help to extinguish suffering don't help, because we get distracted by the things which aggravate it. It's just as if we have an itch on our head and we scratch our leg! If it's our head that's itchy then we're obviously not going to get much relief. In the same way, when suffering arises we don't know how to handle it, we don't know the practice leading to the end of suffering.

For instance, take this body, this body that each of us has brought along to this meeting. If we just see the form of the body there's no way we can escape suffering. Why not? Because we still don't see the inside of the body, we only see the outside. We only see it as something beautiful, something substantial. The Buddha said that seeing only this is not enough. We see the outside with

our eyes; a child can see it, animals can see it, it's not difficult. The outside of the body is easily seen, but having seen it we stick to it, we don't know the truth of it. Having seen it we grab onto it and it bites us!

So we should investigate the body within the body. Whatever is in the body, go ahead and look at it. If we just see the outside it's not clear. We see hair, nails and so on and they are just pretty things which entice us. So the Buddha taught to see the inside of the body, to see the body within the body. What is in the body? Look closely within! We will find many surprises inside, because even though they are within us, we've never seen them. Wherever we walk we carry them with us; sitting in a car we carry them with us, but we still don't know them at all!

It's as if we visit some relatives at their house and they give us a present. We take it and put it in our bag and then leave without opening it to see what is inside. When at last we open it - it's full of poisonous snakes! Our body is like this. If we just see the shell we say it's fine and beautiful. We forget ourselves. We forget impermanence, suffering and not-self. If we look within this body, it's really repulsive.

If we look according to reality, without trying to sugar things over, we'll see that it's really pitiful and wearisome. Dispassion will arise. This feeling of 'disinterest' is not that we feel aversion for the world or anything; it's simply our mind clearing up, our mind letting go. We see things as not substantial or dependable, but that all things are naturally established just as they are. However we want them to be, they just go their own way regardless. Whether we laugh or cry, they simply are the way they are. Things which are unstable are unstable; things which are not beautiful are not beautiful.

So the Buddha said that when we experience sights, sounds, tastes, smells, bodily feelings or mental states, we should release them. When the ear hears sounds, let them go. When the nose smells an odour, let it go, just leave it at the nose! When bodily feelings arise, let go of the like or dislike that follow, let them go back to their birth-place. The same for mental states. All these things, just let them go their way. This is knowing. Whether it's happiness or unhappiness, it's all the same. This is called meditation.

Meditation means to make the mind peaceful in order to let wisdom arise. This requires that we practise with body and mind in order to see and know the sense impressions of form, sound, taste, smell, touch and mental formations. To put it briefly, it's just a matter of happiness and unhappiness. Happiness is pleasant feeling in the mind, unhappiness is just unpleasant feeling. The Buddha taught to separate this happiness and unhappiness from the mind. The mind is that which knows. Feeling¹ is the characteristic of

happiness or unhappiness, like or dislike. When the mind indulges in these things we say that it clings to or takes that happiness and unhappiness to be worthy of holding. That clinging is an action of mind; that happiness or unhappiness is feeling.

When we say the Buddha told us to separate the mind from the feeling, he didn't literally mean to throw them to different places. He meant that the mind must know happiness and know unhappiness. When sitting in samādhi, for example, and peace fills the mind, happiness comes but it doesn't reach us, unhappiness comes but doesn't reach us. This is how one separates the feeling from the mind. We can compare it to oil and water in a bottle. They don't combine. Even if you try to mix them, the oil remains oil and the water remains water, because they are of different density.

The natural state of the mind is neither happiness nor unhappiness. When feeling enters the mind then happiness or unhappiness is born. If we have mindfulness then we know pleasant feeling as pleasant feeling. The mind which knows will not pick it up. Happiness is there but it's 'outside' the mind, not buried within the mind. The mind simply knows it clearly.

If we separate unhappiness from the mind, does that mean there is no suffering, that we don't experience it? Yes, we experience it, but we know mind as mind, feeling as feeling. We don't cling to that feeling or carry it around. The Buddha separated these things through knowledge. Did he have suffering? He knew the state of suffering but he didn't cling to it; so we say that he cut suffering off. And there was happiness too, but he knew that happiness; if it's not known, it's like a poison. He didn't hold it to be himself. Happiness was there through knowledge, but it didn't exist in his mind. Thus we say that he separated happiness and unhappiness from his mind.

When we say that the Buddha and the Enlightened Ones killed defilements, it's not that they really killed them. If they had killed all defilements then we probably wouldn't have any! They didn't kill defilements; when they knew them for what they are, they let them go. Someone who's stupid will grab them, but the Enlightened Ones knew the defilements in their own minds as a poison, so they swept them out. They swept out the things which caused them to suffer, they didn't kill them. One who doesn't know this will see some things, such as happiness, as good, and then grab them, but the Buddha just knew them and simply brushed them away.

But when feeling arises for us we indulge in it; that is, the mind carries that happiness and unhappiness around. In fact they are two different things. The activities of mind, pleasant feeling, unpleasant feeling and so on, are mental impressions, they are the world. If the mind knows this it can equally do work involving happiness or unhappiness. Why? Because it knows the truth of

these things. Someone who doesn't know them sees them as having different value, but one who knows sees them as equal. If you cling to happiness it will be the birthplace of unhappiness later on, because happiness is unstable, it changes all the time. When happiness disappears, unhappiness arises.

The Buddha knew that because both happiness and unhappiness are unsatisfactory, they have the same value. When happiness arose he let it go. He had right practice, seeing that both these things have equal values and drawbacks. They come under the Law of Dhamma, that is, they are unstable and unsatisfactory. Once born, they die. When he saw this, right view arose, the right way of practice became clear. No matter what sort of feeling or thinking arose in his mind, he knew it as simply the continuous play of happiness and unhappiness. He didn't cling to them.

When the Buddha was newly enlightened he gave a sermon about indulgence in pleasure and indulgence in pain. 'Monks! Indulgence in pleasure is the loose way, indulgence in pain is the tense way.' These were the two things that disturbed his practice until the day he was enlightened, because at first he didn't let go of them. When he knew them, he let them go, and so was able to give his first sermon.

So we say that a meditator should not walk the way of happiness or unhappiness, rather he should know them. Knowing the truth of suffering, he will know the cause of suffering, the end of suffering and the way leading to the end of suffering. And the way out of suffering is meditation itself. To put it simply, we must be mindful.

Mindfulness is knowing, or presence of mind. Right now what are we thinking, what are we doing? What do we have with us right now? We observe like this, we are aware of how we are living. Practising like this, wisdom can arise. We consider and investigate at all times, in all postures. When a mental impression arises that we like we know it as such, we don't hold it to be anything substantial. It's just happiness. When unhappiness arises we know that it's indulgence in pain, it's not the path of a meditator.

This is what we call separating the mind from the feeling. If we are clever we don't attach, we leave things be. We become the 'one who knows'. The mind and feeling are just like oil and water; they are in the same bottle but they don't mix. Even if we are sick or in pain, we still know the feeling as feeling, the mind as mind. We know the painful or comfortable states but we don't identify with them. We stay only with peace: the peace beyond both comfort and pain.

You should understand it like this, because if there is no permanent self then there is no refuge. You must live like this, that is, without happiness and

without unhappiness. You stay only with the knowing, you don't carry things around.

As long as we are still unenlightened all this may sound strange but it doesn't matter, we just set our goal in this direction. The mind is the mind. It meets happiness and unhappiness and we see them as merely that, there's nothing more to it. They are divided, not mixed. If they are all mixed up then we don't know them. It's like living in a house; the house and its occupant are related, but separate. If there is danger in our house we are distressed because we must protect it, but if the house catches fire we get out of it. If painful feeling arises we get out of it, just like that house. When it's full of fire and we know it, we come running out of it. They are separate things; the house is one thing, the occupant is another.

We say that we separate mind and feeling in this way but in fact they are by nature already separate. Our realization is simply to know this natural separateness according to reality. When we say they are not separated it's because we're clinging to them through ignorance of the truth.

So the Buddha told us to meditate. This practice of meditation is very important. Merely to know with the intellect is not enough. The knowledge which arises from practice with a peaceful mind and the knowledge which comes from study are really far apart. The knowledge which comes from study is not real knowledge of our mind. The mind tries to hold onto and keep this knowledge. Why do we try to keep it? Just to lose it! And then when it's lost we cry.

If we really know, then there's letting go, leaving things be. We know how things are and don't forget ourselves. If it happens that we are sick we don't get lost in that. Some people think, 'This year I was sick the whole time, I couldn't meditate at all.' These are the words of a really foolish person. Someone who's sick or dying should really be diligent in his practice. One may say he doesn't have time to meditate. He's sick, he's suffering, he doesn't trust his body, and so he feels that he can't meditate. If we think like this then things are difficult. The Buddha didn't teach like that. He said that right here is the place to meditate. When we're sick or almost dying that's when we can really know and see reality.

Other people say they don't have the chance to meditate because they're too busy. Sometimes schoolteachers come to see me. They say they have many responsibilities so there's no time to meditate. I ask them, 'When you're teaching do you have time to breathe?' They answer, 'Yes.' 'So how can you have time to breathe if the work is so hectic and confusing? Here you are far from Dhamma.'

Actually this practice is just about the mind and its feelings. It's not something that you have to run after or struggle for. Breathing continues while working. Nature takes care of the natural processes - all we have to do is try to be aware. Just to keep trying, going inwards to see clearly. Meditation is like this.

If we have that presence of mind then whatever work we do will be the very tool which enables us to know right and wrong continually. There's plenty of time to meditate; we just don't fully understand the practice, that's all. While sleeping we breathe, while eating we breathe, don't we? Why don't we have time to meditate? Wherever we are we breathe. If we think like this then our life has as much value as our breath; wherever we are we have time.

All kinds of thinking are mental conditions, not conditions of body, so we need to simply have presence of mind. Then we will know right and wrong at all times. Standing, walking, sitting and lying, there's plenty of time. We just don't know how to use it properly. Please consider this.

We can not run away from feeling, we must know it. Feeling is just feeling, happiness is just happiness, unhappiness is just unhappiness. They are simply that. So why should we cling to them? If the mind is clever, simply hearing this is enough to enable us to separate feeling from the mind.

If we investigate like this continuously the mind will find release, but it's not escaping through ignorance. The mind lets go, but it knows. It doesn't let go through stupidity or because it doesn't want things to be the way they are. It lets go because it knows according to the truth. This is seeing nature, the reality that's all around us.

When we know this we are someone who's skilled with the mind, we are skilled with mental impressions. When we are skilled with mental impressions we are skilled with the world. This is to be a 'knower of the world'. The Buddha was someone who clearly knew the world with all its difficulty. He knew the troublesome, and that which was not troublesome was right there. This world is so confusing; how is it that the Buddha was able to know it? Here we should understand that the Dhamma taught by the Buddha is not beyond our ability. In all postures we should have presence of mind and self awareness - and when it's time to sit in meditation we do that.

We sit in meditation to establish peacefulness and cultivate mental energy. We don't do it in order to play around at anything special. Insight meditation is sitting in samādhi itself. At some places they say, 'Now we are going to sit in samādhi, after that we'll do insight meditation.' Don't divide them like this! Tranquillity is the base which gives rise to wisdom; wisdom is the fruit of tranquillity. To say that now we are going to do calm meditation, later we'll

do insight - you can't do that! You can only divide them in speech. Just like a knife, the blade is on one side, the back of the blade on the other. You can't divide them. If you pick up one side you get both sides. Tranquillity gives rise to wisdom like this.

Morality is the father and mother of Dhamma. In the beginning we must have morality. Morality is peace. This means that one does no wrongdoings in body or speech. When we don't do wrong then we don't get agitated; when we don't become agitated then peace and collectedness arise within the mind.

So we say that morality, concentration and wisdom are the path on which all the Noble Ones have walked to enlightenment. They are all one. Morality is concentration, concentration is morality. Concentration is wisdom, wisdom is concentration. It's like a mango. When it's a flower we call it a flower. When it becomes a fruit we call it a mango. When it ripens we call it a ripe mango. It's all one mango but it continually changes. The big mango grows from the small mango, the small mango becomes a big one. You can call them different fruits or all one fruit. Morality, concentration and wisdom are related like this. In the end it's all the path that leads to enlightenment.

The mango, from the moment it first appears as a flower, simply grows to ripeness. This is enough; we should see it like this. Whatever others call it, it doesn't matter. Once it's born it grows to old age, and then where? We should contemplate this.

Some people don't want to be old. When they get old they become depressed. These people shouldn't eat ripe mangoes! Why do we want the mangoes to be ripe? If they're not ripe in time, we ripen them artificially, don't we? But when we become old we are filled with regret. Some people cry; they're afraid to get old or die. If it's like this then they shouldn't eat ripe mangoes - better to eat just the flowers! If we can see this then we can see the Dhamma. Everything clears up, we are at peace. Just determine to practise like that.

Today the Chief Privy Councillor and his party have come together to hear the Dhamma. You should take what I've said and contemplate it. If anything is not right, please excuse me. But for you to know whether it's right or wrong depends on your practising and seeing for yourselves. Whatever is wrong, throw it out. If it's right then take it and use it. But actually we practise in order to let go of both right and wrong. In the end we just throw everything out. If it's right, throw it out; wrong, throw it out! Usually if it's right we cling to rightness, if it's wrong we hold it to be wrong, and then arguments follow. But the Dhamma is the place where there's nothing - nothing at all.

¹: Feeling is a translation of the Pāli word *vedanā*, and should be understood in the sense Ajahn Chah herein describes it: as the mental states of pleasure

and pain.

Convention And Liberation

The things of this world are merely conventions of our own making. Having established them we get lost in them, and refuse to let go, giving rise to clinging to personal views and opinions. This clinging never ends, it is samsāra, flowing endlessly on. It has no completion. Now, if we know conventional reality then we'll know liberation. If we clearly know liberation, then we'll know convention. This is to know the Dhamma. Here there is completion.

Take people, for instance. In reality people don't have any names, we are born naked into the world. Our names arise only through convention. I've contemplated this and seen that if you don't know the truth of this convention, it can be really harmful. It's simply something we use for convenience. Without it we couldn't communicate, there would be nothing to say, no language.

I've seen Westerners when they sit in meditation together in the West. When they get up after sitting, men and women together, sometimes they go and touch each other on the head!¹ When I saw this I thought, 'Ehh, if we cling to convention it gives rise to defilements right there.' If we can let go of convention, give up our opinions, we are at peace.

Like the generals and colonels, men of rank and position, who come to see me. When they come they say, 'Oh, please touch my head.'² If they ask like this, there's nothing wrong with it; they're glad to have their heads touched. But if you tapped their heads in the middle of the street it'd be a different story! This is because of clinging. So I feel that letting go is really the way to peace. Touching a head is against our customs, but in reality it is nothing. When they agree to having it touched there's nothing wrong with it, just like touching a cabbage or a potato.

Accepting, giving up, letting go - this is the way of lightness. Wherever you're clinging there's becoming and birth right there. There's danger right there. The Buddha taught about convention and he taught to undo convention in the right way, and so reach liberation.

This is freedom: not to cling to conventions. All things in this world have a conventional reality. Having established them we should not be fooled by them, because getting lost in them really leads to suffering. This point concerning rules and conventions is of utmost importance. One who can get beyond them is beyond suffering.

However, they are a characteristic of our world. Take Mr. Boonmah, for instance; he used to be just one of the crowd but now he's been appointed the

District Commissioner. It's just a convention but it's a convention we should respect. It's part of the world of people. If you think, 'Oh, before we were friends, we used to work at the tailor's together,' and then you go and pat him on the head in public, he'll get angry. It's not right, he'll resent it. So we should follow the conventions in order to avoid giving rise to resentment. It's useful to understand convention; living in the world is just about this. Know the right time and place, know the person.

Why is it wrong to go against conventions? It's wrong because of people! You should be clever, knowing both convention and liberation. Know the right time for each. If we know how to use rules and conventions comfortably then we are skilled. But if we try to behave according to the higher level of reality in the wrong situation, this is wrong. Where is it wrong? It's wrong with people's defilements, that's where! People all have defilements. In one situation we behave one way, in another situation we must behave in another way. We should know the ins and outs because we live within conventions. Problems occur because people cling to them. If we suppose something to be, then it is. It's there because we suppose it to be there. But if you look closely, in the absolute sense these things don't really exist.

As I have often said, before we were laymen and now we are monks. We lived within the convention of 'layman' and now we live within the convention of 'monk'. We are monks by convention, not monks through liberation. In the beginning we establish conventions like this, but if a person merely ordains, this doesn't mean he overcomes defilements. If we take a handful of sand and agree to call it salt, does this make it salt? It is salt, but only in name, not in reality. You couldn't use it to cook with. It's only use is within the realm of that agreement, because there's really no salt there, only sand. It becomes salt only through our supposing it to be so.

This word 'liberation' is itself just a convention, but it refers to that which is beyond conventions. Having achieved freedom, having reached liberation, we still have to use convention in order to refer to it as liberation. If we didn't have convention we couldn't communicate, so it does have its use.

For example, people have different names, but they are all people just the same. If we didn't have names to differentiate between each other, and we wanted to call out to somebody standing in a crowd, saying, 'Hey, Person! Person!' would be useless. You couldn't say who would answer you because they're all 'person'. But if you called, 'Hey, John!' then John would respond, and the others wouldn't. Names fulfil just this need. Through them we can communicate; they provide the basis for social behaviour.

So you should know both convention and liberation. Conventions have a use, but in reality there really isn't anything there. Even people are non-existent.

They are merely groups of elements, born of causal conditions, growing dependent on conditions, existing for a while, then disappearing in the natural way. No one can oppose or control it. But without conventions we would have nothing to say, we'd have no names, no practice, no work. Rules and conventions are established to give us a language, to make things convenient, and that's all.

Take money, for example. In olden times there weren't any coins or notes, they had no value. People used to barter goods, but those things were difficult to keep, so they created money, using coins and notes. Perhaps in the future we'll have a new king decree that we don't have to use paper money, we should use wax, melting it down and pressing it into lumps. We'll say this is money and use it throughout the country. Let alone wax, they might even decide to make chicken dung the local currency - all the other things can't be money, just chicken dung! Then people would fight and kill each other over chicken dung!

This is the way it is. You could use many examples to illustrate convention. What we use for money is simply a convention that we have set up; it has its use within that convention. Having decreed it to be money, it becomes money. But in reality, what is money? Nobody can say. When there is a popular agreement about something, then a convention comes about to fulfil the need. The world is just this.

This is convention, but to get ordinary people to understand liberation is really difficult. Our money, our house, our family, our children and relatives are simply conventions that we have invented, but really, seen in the light of Dhamma, they don't belong to us. Maybe if we hear this we don't feel so good, but reality is like that. These things have value only through the established conventions. If we establish that it doesn't have value, then it doesn't have value. If we establish that it has value, then it has value. This is the way it is; we bring convention into the world to fulfil a need.

Even this body is not really ours, we just suppose it to be so. It's truly just an assumption on our part. If you try to find a real, substantial self within it, you can't. There are merely elements which are born, continue for a while and then die. Everything is like this. There's no real, true substance to it, but it's proper that we use it. It's like a cup. At some time that cup must break, but while it's there you should use it and look after it well. It's a tool for your use. If it breaks there is trouble, so even though it must break, you should try your utmost to preserve it.

And so we have the four supports³ which the Buddha taught again and again to contemplate. They are the supports on which a monk depends to continue

his practice. As long as you live you must depend on them, but you should understand them. Don't cling to them, giving rise to craving in your mind.

Convention and liberation are continually related like this. Even though we use convention, don't place your trust in it as being the truth. If you cling to it, suffering will arise. The case of right and wrong is a good example. Some people see wrong as being right and right as being wrong, but in the end who really knows what is right and what is wrong? We don't know. Different people establish different conventions about what's right and what's wrong, but the Buddha took suffering as his guide-line. If you want to argue about it there's no end to it. One says 'right', another says 'wrong'. One says 'wrong', another says 'right'. In truth we don't really know right and wrong at all. But at a useful, practical level, we can say that right is not to harm oneself and not to harm others. This way fulfils a constructive purpose for us.

After all, rules, conventions and liberation are simply dhammas. One is higher than the other, but they go hand in hand. There is no way that we can guarantee that anything is definitely like this or like that, so the Buddha said to just leave it be. Leave it be as uncertain. However much you like it or dislike it, you should understand it as uncertain.

Regardless of time and place, the whole practice of Dhamma comes to completion at the place where there is nothing. It's the place of surrender, of emptiness, of laying down the burden. This is the finish. It's not like the person who says, 'Why is the flag fluttering in the wind? I say it's because of the wind.' Another person says it's because of the flag. The other retorts that it's because of the wind. There's no end to this! The same as the old riddle, 'Which came first, the chicken or the egg?' There's no way to reach a conclusion, this is just nature.

All these things we say are merely conventions, we establish them ourselves. If you know these things with wisdom then you'll know impermanence, suffering and not-self. This is the outlook which leads to enlightenment.

Training and teaching people with varying levels of understanding is really difficult. Some people have certain ideas; you tell them something and they don't believe you. You tell them the truth and they say it's not true. 'I'm right, you're wrong.' There's no end to this.

If you don't let go there will be suffering. I've told you before about the four men who go into the forest. They hear a chicken crowing, 'Kak-ka-dehhhh!' One of them wonders, 'Is that a rooster or a hen?' Three of them say together, 'It's a hen,' but the other doesn't agree, he insists it's a rooster. 'How could a hen crow like that?' he asks. They retort, 'Well, it has a mouth, hasn't it?' They argue and argue till the tears fall, really getting upset over it, but in the

end they're all wrong. Whether you say a hen or a rooster, they're only names. We establish these conventions, saying a rooster is like this, a hen is like that; a rooster cries like this, a hen cries like that, and this is how we get stuck in the world! Remember this! Actually, if you just say that really there's no hen and no rooster, then that's the end of it.

In the field of conventional reality one side is right and the other side is wrong, but there will never be complete agreement. Arguing till the tears fall has no use.

The Buddha taught not to cling. How do we practise non-clinging? We practise simply by giving up clinging, but this non-clinging is very difficult to understand. It takes keen wisdom to investigate and penetrate this, to really achieve non-clinging.

When you think about it, whether people are happy or sad, content or discontent, doesn't depend on their having little or having much - it depends on wisdom. All distress can be transcended only through wisdom, through seeing the truth of things.

So the Buddha exhorted us to investigate, to contemplate. This 'contemplation' means simply to try to solve these problems correctly. This is our practice. Like birth, old age, sickness and death - they are the most natural and common of occurrences. The Buddha taught to contemplate birth, old age, sickness and death, but some people don't understand this. 'What is there to contemplate?' they say. They're born but they don't know birth, they will die but they don't know death.

A person who investigates these things repeatedly will see. Having seen he will gradually solve his problems. Even if he still has clinging, if he has wisdom and sees that old age, sickness and death are the way of nature, he will be able to relieve suffering. We study the Dhamma simply for this: to cure suffering.

There isn't really much as the basis of Buddhism, there's just the birth and death of suffering, and this the Buddha called the truth. Birth is suffering, old age is suffering, sickness is suffering and death is suffering. People don't see this suffering as the truth. If we know truth, then we know suffering.

This pride in personal opinions, these arguments, they have no end. In order to put our minds at rest, to find peace, we should contemplate our past, the present, and the things which are in store for us, like birth, old age, sickness and death. What can we do to avoid being plagued by these things? Even though we may still have a little worry, if we investigate until we know according to the truth, all suffering will abate, because we will no longer cling to things.

¹: To touch a person's head in Thailand is usually considered an insult.

²: It is considered auspicious in Thailand to have one's head touched by a highly esteemed monk.

³: The four supports are robes, almsfood, lodgings and medicines.

No Abiding

We hear some of the teachings and can't really understand them. We think they shouldn't be the way they are, so we don't follow them, but really there is a reason to all the teachings. Maybe it seems that things shouldn't be that way, but they are. At first I didn't even believe in sitting meditation. I couldn't see what use it would be to just sit with your eyes closed. And walking meditation, walking from this tree to that tree, turning around and walking back again. 'Why bother?' I thought, 'What's the use of all that walking?' I thought like that, but actually walking and sitting meditation are of great use.

Some people's tendencies cause them to prefer walking meditation, others prefer sitting, but you can't do without either of them. The scriptures refer to the four postures: standing, walking, sitting and lying down. We live with these four postures. We may prefer one to the other, but we must use all four.

The scriptures say to make these four postures even, to make the practice even in all postures. At first I couldn't figure out what it meant to make them even. Maybe it means we sleep for two hours, then stand for two hours, then walk for two hours ... maybe that's it? I tried it - couldn't do it, it was impossible! That's not what it meant to make the postures even. 'Making the postures even' refers to the mind, to our awareness, giving rise to wisdom in the mind, to illumine the mind. This wisdom of ours must be present in all postures; we must know, or understand, constantly. Standing, walking, sitting or lying down, we know all mental states as impermanent, unsatisfactory and not-self. Making the postures even in this way can be done, it is possible. Whether like or dislike are present in the mind, we don't forget our practice, we are aware.

If we just focus our attention on the mind constantly then we have the gist of the practice. Whether we experience mental states which the world knows as good or bad we don't forget ourselves. We don't get lost in good or bad, we just go straight. Making the postures constant in this way is possible.

If we have constancy in our practice, when we are praised, then it's simply praise; if we are blamed, it's just blame. We don't get high or low over it, we stay right here. Why? Because we see the danger in all those things, we see their results. We are constantly aware of the danger in both praise and blame. Normally, if we have a good mood the mind is good also, we see them as the same thing; if we have a bad mood the mind goes bad as well, we don't like it. This is the way it is, this is uneven practice.

If we have constancy just to the extent of knowing our moods, and knowing we're clinging to them, this is better already. That is, we have awareness, we

know what's going on, but we still can't let go. We see ourselves clinging to good and bad, and we know it. We cling to good and know it's not right practice, but we still can't let go. This is fifty to seventy per cent of the practice already. There still isn't release but we know that if we could let go, that would be the way to peace. We keep seeing the equally harmful consequences of all our likes and dislikes, of praise and blame, continuously. Whatever the conditions may be, the mind is constant in this way.

But if worldly people get blamed or criticized, they get really upset. If they get praised it cheers them up, they say it's good and get really happy over it. If we know the truth of our various moods, if we know the consequences of clinging to praise and blame, the danger of clinging to anything at all, we will become sensitive to our moods. We will know that clinging to them really causes suffering. We see this suffering, and we see our very clinging as the cause of that suffering. We begin to see the consequences of grabbing and clinging to good and bad, because we've grasped them and seen the result before - no real happiness. So now we look for the way to let go.

Where is this 'way to let go'? In Buddhism we say 'Don't cling to anything.' We never stop hearing about this 'don't cling to anything!' This means to hold, but not to cling. Like this flashlight. We think, 'What is this?' So we pick it up, 'Oh, it's a flashlight,' then we put it down again. We hold things in this way.

If we didn't hold anything at all, what could we do? We couldn't do walking meditation or do anything, so we must hold things first. It's wanting, yes, that's true, but later on it leads to *pāramī* (virtue or perfection). Like wanting to come here, for instance. Venerable Jagaro¹ came to Wat Pah Pong. He had to want to come first. If he hadn't felt that he wanted to come he wouldn't have come. For anybody it's the same, they come here because of wanting. But when wanting arises don't cling to it! So you come, and then you go back. What is this? We pick it up, look at it and see, 'Oh, it's a flashlight,' then we put it down. This is called holding but not clinging, we let go. We know and then we let go. To put it simply we say just this, 'Know, then let go.' Keep looking and letting go. 'This, they say is good; this they say is not good' ... know, and then let go. Good and bad, we know it all, but we let it go. We don't foolishly cling to things, but we 'hold' them with wisdom. Practising in this 'posture' can be constant. You must be constant like this. Make the mind know in this way; let wisdom arise. When the mind has wisdom, what else is there to look for?

We should reflect on what we are doing here. For what reason are we living here, what are we working for? In the world they work for this or that reward, but the monks teach something a little deeper than that. Whatever we do, we

ask for no return. We work for no reward. Worldly people work because they want this or that, because they want some gain or other, but the Buddha taught to work just in order to work; we don't ask for anything beyond that.

If you do something just to get some return it'll cause suffering. Try it out for yourself! You want to make your mind peaceful so you sit down and try to make it peaceful - you'll suffer! Try it. Our way is more refined. We do, and then let go; do, and then let go.

Look at the Brahmin who makes a sacrifice. He has some desire in mind, so he makes a sacrifice. Those actions of his won't help him transcend suffering because he's acting on desire. In the beginning we practise with some desire in mind; we practise on and on, but we don't attain our desire. So we practise until we reach a point where we're practising for no return, we're practising in order to let go.

This is something we must see for ourselves, it's very deep. Maybe we practise because we want to go to Nibbāna - right there, you won't get to Nibbāna! It's natural to want peace, but it's not really correct. We must practise without wanting anything at all. If we don't want anything at all, what will we get? We don't get anything! Whatever you get is a cause for suffering, so we practise not getting anything.

Just this is called 'making the mind empty'. It's empty but there is still doing. This emptiness is something people don't usually understand; only those who reach it see the real value of it. It's not the emptiness of not having anything, it's emptiness within the things that are here. Like this flashlight: we should see this flashlight as empty; because of the flashlight there is emptiness. It's not the emptiness where we can't see anything, it's not like that. People who understand like that have got it all wrong. You must understand emptiness within the things that are here.

Those who are still practising because they have some gaining idea are like the Brahmin making a sacrifice just to fulfil some wish. Like the people who come to see me to be sprinkled with 'holy water'. When I ask them, 'Why do you want this holy water?' they say, 'we want to live happily and comfortably and not get sick.' There! They'll never transcend suffering that way.

The worldly way is to do things for a reason, to get some return, but in Buddhism we do things without the idea of gaining anything. The world has to understand things in terms of cause and effect, but the Buddha teaches us to go above and beyond cause and effect. His wisdom was to go above cause, beyond effect; to go above birth and beyond death; to go above happiness and beyond suffering.

Think about it, there's nowhere to stay. We people live in a 'home'. To leave

home and go where there is no home, we don't know how to do it, because we've always lived with becoming, with clinging. If we can't cling we don't know what to do.

So most people don't want to go to Nibbāna, there's nothing there; nothing at all. Look at the roof and the floor here. The upper extreme is the roof, that's an 'abiding'. The lower extreme is the floor, and that's another 'abiding'. But in the empty space between the floor and the roof there's nowhere to stand. One could stand on the roof, or stand on the floor, but not on that empty space. Where there is no abiding, that's where there's emptiness, and Nibbāna is this emptiness.

People hear this and they back up a bit, they don't want to go. They're afraid they won't see their children or relatives. This is why, when we bless the laypeople, we say, 'May you have long life, beauty, happiness and strength.' This makes them really happy, '*sādhu*'! they all say. They like these things. If you start talking about emptiness they don't want it, they're attached to abiding.

But have you ever seen a very old person with a beautiful complexion? Have you ever seen an old person with a lot of strength, or a lot of happiness? No, but we say, 'Long life, beauty, happiness and strength' and they're all really pleased, every single one says *sādhu*! This is like the Brahmin who makes oblations to achieve some wish.

In our practice we don't 'make oblations', we don't practise in order to get some return. We don't want anything. If we want something then there is still something there. Just make the mind peaceful and have done with it. But if I talk like this you may not be very comfortable, because you want to be 'born' again.

All you lay practitioners should get close to the monks and see their practice. To be close to the monks means to be close to the Buddha, to be close to his Dhamma. The Buddha said, 'Ānanda, practise a lot, develop your practice! Whoever sees the Dhamma sees me, and whoever sees me sees the Dhamma.'

Where is the Buddha? We may think the Buddha has been and gone, but the Buddha is the Dhamma, the Truth. Some people like to say, 'Oh, if I had been born in the time of the Buddha I would have gone to Nibbāna.' Here, stupid people talk like this. The Buddha is still here. The Buddha is truth. Regardless of whoever is born or dies, the truth is still here. The truth never departs from the world, it's there all the time. Whether a Buddha is born or not, whether someone knows it or not, the truth is still there.

So we should get close to the Buddha, we should come within and find the Dhamma. When we reach the Dhamma we will reach the Buddha; seeing the

Dhamma we will see the Buddha, and all doubts will dissolve.

To give a comparison, it's like teacher Choo. At first he wasn't a teacher, he was just Mr. Choo. When he studied and passed the necessary grades he became a teacher, and became known as teacher Choo. How did he become a teacher? Through studying the required subjects, thus allowing Mr. Choo to become teacher Choo. When teacher Choo dies, the study to become a teacher still remains, and whoever studies it will become a teacher. That course of study to become a teacher doesn't disappear anywhere, just like the Truth, the knowing of which enabled the Buddha to become the Buddha.

So the Buddha is still here. Whoever practises and sees the Dhamma sees the Buddha. These days people have got it all wrong, they don't know where the Buddha is. They say, 'If I had been born in the time of the Buddha I would have become a disciple of his and become enlightened.' That's just foolishness.

Don't go thinking that at the end of the Rains Retreat you'll disrobe. Don't think like that! In an instant an evil thought can arise in the mind, you could kill somebody. In the same way, it only takes a split-second for good to flash into the mind, and you're there already.

And don't think that you have to ordain for a long time to be able to meditate. The right practice lies in the instant we make kamma. In a flash an evil thought arises and before you know it you've committed some heavy kamma. In the same way, all the disciples of the Buddha practised for a long time, but the time they attained enlightenment was merely one thought moment.

So don't be heedless, even in minor things. Try hard, try to get close to the monks, contemplate things and then you'll know about monks. Well, that's enough, huh? It must be getting late now, some people are getting sleepy. The Buddha said not to teach Dhamma to sleepy people.

¹: Venerable Jagaro: the Australian, second Abbot of Wat Pah Nanachat at that time, who brought his party of monks and laypeople to see Ajahn Chah.

Evening Sitting

I would like to ask you about your practice. You have all been practising meditation here, but are you sure about the practice yet? Ask yourselves, are you confident about the practice yet? These days there are all sorts of meditation teachers around, both monks and lay teachers, and I'm afraid it will cause you to be full of doubts and uncertainty about what you are doing. This is why I am asking. As far as Buddhist practice is concerned, there is really nothing greater or higher than these teachings of the Buddha which you have been practising with here. If you have a clear understanding of them, it will give rise to an absolutely firm and unwavering peace in your heart and mind.

Making the mind peaceful is known as practising meditation, or practising *samādhi*. The mind is something which is extremely changeable and unreliable. Observing from your practice so far, have you seen this yet? Some days you practise sitting meditation and in no time at all the mind is calm, other days you sit and whatever you do there's no calm - the mind constantly struggles to get away, until it eventually does. Some days it goes well, some days it's awful. This is the way the mind displays these different conditions for you to see. You must understand that the eight factors of the Noble Eightfold Path merge in *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*. They don't come together anywhere else. This means that when you bring the factors of your practice together, there must be *sīla*, there must be *samādhi* and there must be *paññā* present together in the mind. It means that in practising meditation right here and now, you are creating the causes for the Path to arise in a very direct way.

In sitting meditation you are taught to close your eyes so that you don't spend your time looking at different things. This is because the Buddha was teaching that you should know your own mind. Observe the mind. If you close your eyes, your attention will naturally be turned inwards towards the mind - the source of many different kinds of knowledge. This is a way of training the mind to give rise to *samādhi*.

Once sitting with the eyes closed, establish awareness with the breath - make awareness of the breath more important than anything else. This means you bring awareness to follow the breath, and by keeping with it, you will know that place which is the focal point of *sati*, the focal point of the knowing and the focal point of the mind's awareness. Whenever these factors of the path are working together, you will be able to watch and see your breath, feelings, mind and *ārammana*, as they are in the present moment. Ultimately, you will know that place which is both the focal point of *samādhi* and the unification point of the Path factors.

When developing samādhi, fix attention on the breath and imagine that you are sitting alone with absolutely no other people and nothing else around to bother you. Develop this perception in the mind, sustaining it until the mind completely lets go of the world outside and all that is left is simply the knowing of the breath entering and leaving. The mind must set aside the external world. Don't allow yourself to start thinking about this person who is sitting over here, or that person who is sitting over there. Don't give space to any thoughts that will give rise to confusion or agitation in the mind - it's better to throw them out and be done with them. There is no one else here, you are sitting all alone. Develop this perception until all the other memories, perceptions and thoughts concerning other people and things subside, and you're no longer doubting or wondering about the other people or things around you. Then you can fix your attention solely on the in-breaths and out-breaths. Breathe normally. Allow the in-breaths and the out-breaths to continue naturally, without forcing them to be longer or shorter, stronger or weaker than normal. Allow the breath to continue in a state of normality and balance, and then sit and observe it entering and leaving the body.

Once the mind has let go of external mind-objects, it means you will no longer feel disturbed by the sound of traffic or other noises. You won't feel irritated with anything outside. Whether it's forms, sounds or whatever, they won't be a source of disturbance, because the mind won't be paying attention to them - it will become centred upon the breath.

If the mind is agitated by different things and you can't concentrate, try taking an extra-deep breath until the lungs are completely full, and then release all the air until there is none left inside. Do this several times, then re-establish awareness and continue to develop concentration. Having re-established mindfulness, it's normal that for a period the mind will be calm, then change and become agitated again. When this happens, make the mind firm, take another deep breath and subsequently expel all the air from your lungs. Fill the lungs to capacity again for a moment and then re-establish mindfulness on the breathing. Fix sati on the in-breaths and the out-breaths, and continue to maintain awareness in this way.

The practice tends to be this way, so it will have to take many sittings and much effort before you become proficient. Once you are, the mind will let go of the external world and remain undisturbed. Mind-objects from the outside will be unable to penetrate inside and disturb the mind itself. Once they are unable to penetrate inside, you will see the mind. You will see the mind as one object of awareness, the breath as another and mind-objects as another. They will all be present within the field of awareness, centred at the tip of your nose. Once sati is firmly established with the in-breaths and out-breaths,

you can continue to practise at your ease. As the mind becomes calm, the breath, which was originally coarse, becomes correspondingly lighter and more refined. The object of mind also becomes increasingly subtle and refined. The body feels lighter and the mind itself feels progressively lighter and unburdened. The mind lets go of external mind-objects and you continue to observe internally.

From here onwards your awareness will be turned away from the world outside and be directed inwards to focus on the mind. Once the mind has gathered together and become concentrated, maintain awareness at that point where the mind becomes focused. As you breathe, you will see the breath clearly as it enters and leaves, sati will be sharp and awareness of mind-objects and mental activity will be clearer. At that point you will see the characteristics of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* and the way in which they merge together. This is known as the unification of the Path factors. Once this unification occurs, your mind will be free from all forms of agitation and confusion. It will become one-pointed and this is what is known as *samādhi*.

When you focus attention in just one place, in this case the breath, you gain a clarity and awareness because of the uninterrupted presence of sati. As you continue to see the breath clearly, sati will become stronger and the mind will become more sensitive in many different ways. You will see the mind in the centre of that place (the breath), one-pointed with awareness focused inwards, rather than turning towards the world outside. The external world gradually disappears from your awareness and the mind no longer goes to perform any work on the outside. It's as if you've come inside your 'house', where all your sense faculties have come together to form one compact unit. You are at ease and the mind is free from all external objects. Awareness remains with the breath and over time it will penetrate deeper and deeper inside, becoming progressively more refined.

Ultimately, awareness of the breath becomes so refined that the sensation of the breath seems to disappear. You could say either that awareness of the sensation of the breath has disappeared, or that the breath itself has disappeared. Then there arises a new kind of awareness - awareness that the breath has disappeared. In other words, awareness of the breath becomes so refined that it's difficult to define it.

So it might be that you are just sitting there and there's no breath. Really, the breath is still there, but it has become so refined that it seems to have disappeared. Why? Because the mind is at its most refined, with a special kind of knowing. All that remains is the knowing. Even though the breath has vanished, the mind is still concentrated with the knowledge that the breath is not there. As you continue, what should you take up as the object of

meditation? Take this very knowing as the meditation object - in other words the knowledge that there is no breath - and sustain this. You could say that a specific kind of knowledge has been established in the mind.

At this point, some people might have doubts arising, because it is here that *nimittā* can arise. These can be of many kinds, including both forms and sounds. It is here that all sorts of unexpected things can arise in the course of the practice. If *nimittā* do arise (some people have them, some don't) you must understand them in accordance with the truth. Don't doubt or allow yourself to become alarmed.

At this stage, you should make the mind unshakeable in its concentration and be especially mindful. Some people become startled when they notice that the breath has disappeared, because they're used to having the breath there. When it appears that the breath has gone, you might panic or become afraid that you are going to die. Here you must establish the understanding that it is just the nature of the practice to progress in this way. What will you observe as the object of meditation now? Observe this feeling that there is no breath and sustain it as the object of awareness as you continue to meditate. The Buddha described this as the firmest, most unshakeable form of *samādhi*. There is just one firm and unwavering object of mind. When your practice of *samādhi* reaches this point, there will be many unusual and refined changes and transformations taking place within the mind, of which you can be aware. The sensation of the body will feel at its lightest or might even disappear altogether. You might feel like you are floating in mid-air and seem to be completely weightless. It might be like you are in the middle of space and wherever you direct your sense faculties they don't seem to register anything at all. Even though you know the body is still sitting there, you experience complete emptiness. This feeling of emptiness can be quite strange.

As you continue to practise, understand that there is nothing to worry about. Establish this feeling of being relaxed and unworried, securely in the mind. Once the mind is concentrated and one-pointed, no mind-object will be able to penetrate or disturb it, and you will be able to sit like this for as long as you want. You will be able to sustain concentration without any feelings of pain and discomfort.

Having developed *samādhi* to this level, you will be able to enter or leave it at will. When you do leave it, it's at your ease and convenience. You withdraw at your ease, rather than because you are feeling lazy or tired. You withdraw from *samādhi* because it is the appropriate time to withdraw, and you come out of it at your will.

This is *samādhi*; you are relaxed and at your ease. You enter and leave it without any problems. The mind and heart are at ease. If you genuinely have

samādhi like this, it means that sitting meditation and entering samādhi for just thirty minutes or an hour will enable you to remain cool and peaceful for many days afterwards. Experiencing the effects of samādhi like this for several days has a purifying effect on the mind - whatever you experience will become an object for contemplation. This is where the practice really begins. It's the fruit which arises as samādhi matures.

Samādhi performs the function of calming the mind. Samādhi performs one function, sīla performs one function and paññā performs another function. These characteristics, which you are focusing attention on and developing in the practice are linked, forming a circle. This is the way they manifest in the mind. Sīla, samādhi and paññā arise and mature from the same place. Once the mind is calm, it will become progressively more restrained and composed due to the presence of paññā and the power of samādhi.

As the mind becomes more composed and refined, this gives rise to an energy which acts to purify sīla. Greater purity of sīla facilitates the development of stronger and more refined samādhi, and this in turn supports the maturing of paññā. They assist each other in this way. Each aspect of the practice acts as a supporting factor for the other ones - in the end these terms becoming synonymous. As these three factors continue to mature together, they form one complete circle, ultimately giving rise to *magga*. *Magga* is a synthesis of these three functions of the practice working smoothly and consistently together. As you practise, you have to preserve this energy. It is the energy which will give rise to vipassanā or paññā. Having reached this stage (where paññā is already functioning in the mind, independent of whether the mind is peaceful or not), paññā will provide a consistent and independent energy in the practice. You see that whenever the mind is not peaceful, you shouldn't attach, and even when it is peaceful, you shouldn't attach. Having let go of the burden of such concerns, the heart will accordingly feel much lighter. Whether you experience pleasant mind-objects or unpleasant mind-objects, you will remain at ease. The mind will remain peaceful in this way.

Another important thing is to see that when you stop doing formal meditation practice, if there is no wisdom functioning in the mind, you will give up the practice altogether without any further contemplation, development of awareness or thought about the work which still has to be done. In fact, when you withdraw from samādhi, you know clearly in the mind that you have withdrawn. Having withdrawn you should continue to conduct yourself in a normal manner. Maintain mindfulness and awareness at all times. It isn't that you only practise meditation in the sitting posture - samādhi means the mind which is firm and unwavering. As you go about your daily life, make the mind firm and steady and maintain this sense of steadiness as the object of

mind at all times. You must be practising sati and *sampajañña* continuously.

After you get up from the formal sitting practice and go about your business - walking, riding in cars and so on - whenever your eyes see a form or your ears hear a sound, maintain awareness. As you experience mind-objects which give rise to liking and disliking, try to consistently maintain awareness of the fact that such mental states are impermanent and uncertain. In this way the mind will remain calm and in a state of 'normality'.

As long as the mind is calm, use it to contemplate mind-objects. Contemplate the whole of this form, the physical body. You can do this at any time and in any posture: whether doing formal meditation practice, relaxing at home, out at work, or in whatever situation you find yourself. Keep the meditation and the reflection going at all times. Just going for a walk and seeing dead leaves on the ground under a tree can provide an opportunity to contemplate impermanence. Both we and the leaves are the same: when we get old, we shrivel up and die. Other people are all the same. This is raising the mind to the level of vipassanā, contemplating the truth of the way things are, the whole time. Whether walking, standing, sitting or lying down, sati is sustained evenly and consistently. This is practising meditation correctly - you have to follow the mind closely, checking it at all times.

Practising here and now at seven o'clock in the evening, we have sat and meditated together for an hour and now stopped. It might be that your mind has stopped practising completely and hasn't continued with the reflection. That's the wrong way to do it. When we stop, all that should stop is the formal meeting and sitting meditation. You should continue practising and developing awareness consistently, without letting up.

I've often taught that if you don't practise consistently, it's like drops of water. It's like drops of water because the practice is not a continuous, uninterrupted flow. Sati is not sustained evenly. The important point is that the mind does the practice and nothing else. The body doesn't do it. The mind does the work, the mind does the practice. If you understand this clearly, you will see that you don't necessarily have to do formal sitting meditation in order for the mind to know samādhi. The mind is the one who does the practice. You have to experience and understand this for yourself, in your own mind.

Once you do see this for yourself, you will be developing awareness in the mind at all times and in all postures. If you are maintaining sati as an even and unbroken flow, it's as if the drops of water have joined to form a smooth and continuous flow of running water. Sati is present in the mind from moment to moment and accordingly there will be awareness of mind-objects at all times. If the mind is restrained and composed with uninterrupted sati,

you will know mind-objects each time that wholesome and unwholesome mental states arise. You will know the mind that is calm and the mind that is confused and agitated. Wherever you go you will be practising like this. If you train the mind in this way, your meditation will mature quickly and successfully.

Please don't misunderstand. These days it's common for people to go on vipassanā courses for three or seven days, where they don't have to speak or do anything but meditate. Maybe you have gone on a silent meditation retreat for a week or two, afterwards returning to your normal daily life. You might have left thinking that you've 'done vipassanā' and, because you feel that you know what it's all about, then carry on going to parties, discos and indulging in different forms of sensual delight. When you do it like this, what happens? There won't be any of the fruits of vipassanā left by the end of it. If you go and do all sorts of unskilful things, which disturb and upset the mind, wasting your previous efforts, then next year go back again and do another retreat for seven days or a few weeks, then come out and carry on with the parties, discos and drinking, that isn't true practice. It isn't *patipadā* or the path to progress.

You need to make an effort to renounce. You must contemplate until you see the harmful effects which come from such behaviour. See the harm in drinking and going out on the town. Reflect and see the harm inherent in all the different kinds of unskilful behaviour which you indulge in, until it becomes fully apparent. This would provide the impetus for you to take a step back and change your ways. Then you would find some real peace. To experience peace of mind you have to clearly see the disadvantages and danger in such forms of behaviour. This is practising in the correct way. If you do a silent retreat for seven days, where you don't have to speak to or get involved with anybody, and then go chatting, gossiping and overindulging for another seven months, how will you gain any real or lasting benefit from those seven days of practice?

I would encourage all the laypeople here who are practising to develop awareness and wisdom to understand this point. Try to practise consistently. See the disadvantages of practising insincerely and inconsistently, and try to sustain a more dedicated and continuous effort in the practice. Just this much. It can then become a realistic possibility that you might put an end to the *kilesā*. But that lifestyle of not speaking and not playing around for seven days, followed by six months of complete sensual indulgence, without any mindfulness or restraint, will just lead to the squandering of any gains made from the meditation - there won't be anything left. It's like going to work for a day and earning twenty pounds, but then going out and spending thirty

pounds on food and things in the same day; would any money be saved? It would all be gone. It's just the same with the meditation.

This is a form of reminder to you all, so I will ask for your forgiveness. It's necessary to speak in this way, so that those aspects of the practice which are at fault will become clear to you and accordingly, you will be able to give them up. You could say that the reason why you have come to practise is to learn how to avoid doing the wrong things in the future. What happens when you do the wrong things? Doing wrong things leads you to agitation and suffering, when there's no goodness in the mind. It's not the way to peace of mind. This is the way it is. If you practise on a retreat, not talking for seven days, and then go indulging for a few months, no matter how strictly you practised for those seven days, you won't derive any lasting value from that practice. Practising that way, you don't really get anywhere. Many places where meditation is taught don't really get to grips with or get beyond this problem. Really, you have to conduct your daily life in a consistently calm and restrained way.

In meditation you have to be constantly turning your attention to the practice. It's like planting a tree. If you plant a tree in one place and after three days pull it up and plant it in a different spot, then after a further three days pull it up and plant it in yet another place, it will just die without producing anything. Practising meditation like this won't bear any fruit either. This is something you have to understand for yourselves. Contemplate it. Try it out for yourselves when you go home. Get a sapling and plant it in one spot, and every few days, go and pull it up and plant it in a different place. It will just die without ever bearing any fruit. It's the same doing a meditation retreat for seven days, followed by seven months of unrestrained behaviour, allowing the mind to become soiled, and then going back to do another retreat for a short period, practising strictly without talking and subsequently coming out and being unrestrained again. As with the tree, the meditation just dies - none of the wholesome fruits are retained. The tree doesn't grow, the meditation doesn't grow. I say practising this way doesn't bear much fruit.

Actually, I'm not fond of giving talks like this. It's because I feel sorry for you that I have to speak critically. When you are doing the wrong things, it's my duty to tell you, but I'm speaking out of compassion for you. Some people might feel uneasy and think that I'm just scolding them. Really, I'm not just scolding you for its own sake, I'm helping to point out where you are going wrong, so that you know. Some people might think, *Luang Por* is just telling us off,' but it's not like that. It's only once in a long while that I'm able to come and give a talk - if I were to give talks like this every day, you would really get upset! But the truth is, it's not you who gets upset, it's only the

kilesā that are upset. I will say just this much for now.

About Being Careful

The Buddha taught to see the body in the body. What does this mean? We are all familiar with the parts of the body such as hair, nails, teeth and skin. So how do we see the body in the body? If we recognize all these things as being impermanent, unsatisfactory and not-self, that's what is called 'seeing the body in the body'. Then it isn't necessary to go into detail and meditate on the separate parts. It's like having fruit in a basket. If we have already counted the pieces of fruit, then we know what's there, and when we need to, we can pick up the basket and take it away, and all the pieces come with it. We know the fruit is all there, so we don't have to count it again.

Having meditated on the thirty-two parts of the body, and recognized them as something not stable or permanent, we no longer need to weary ourselves separating them like this and meditating in such detail; just as we don't have to dump all the fruit out of the basket and count it again and again. But we do carry the basket along to our destination, walking mindfully and carefully, taking care not to stumble and fall.

When we see the body in the body, which means we see the Dhamma in the body, knowing our own and others' bodies as impermanent phenomena, we don't need detailed explanations. Sitting here, we have mindfulness constantly in control, knowing things as they are. Meditation then becomes quite simple. It's the same if we meditate on *Buddho* - if we understand what *Buddho* really is, we don't need to repeat the word '*Buddho*'. It means having full knowledge and firm awareness. This is meditation.

Still, meditation is generally not well understood. We practise in a group, but we often don't know what it's all about. Some people think meditation is really hard to do. 'I come to the monastery, but I can't sit. I don't have much endurance. My legs hurt, my back aches, I'm in pain all over.' So they give up on it and don't come anymore, thinking they can't do it.

But in fact samādhi is not sitting. Samādhi isn't walking. It isn't lying down or standing. Sitting, walking, closing the eyes, opening the eyes, these are all mere actions. Having your eyes closed doesn't necessarily mean you're practising samādhi. It could just mean that you're drowsy and dull. If you're sitting with your eyes closed but you're falling asleep, your head bobbing all over and your mouth hanging open, that's not sitting in samādhi. It's sitting with your eyes closed. Samādhi and closed eyes are two separate matters. Real samādhi can be practised with eyes open or eyes closed. You can be sitting, walking, standing or lying down.

Samādhi means the mind is firmly focused, with all-encompassing

mindfulness, restraint, and caution. You are constantly aware of right and wrong, constantly watching all conditions arising in the mind. When it shoots off to think of something, having a mood of aversion or longing, you are aware of that. Some people get discouraged: 'I just can't do it. As soon as I sit, my mind starts thinking of home. That's evil (Thai: *bahp*)'. Hey! If just that much is evil, the Buddha never would have become Buddha. He spent five years struggling with his mind, thinking of his home and his family. It was only after six years that he awakened.

So, some people feel that these sudden arisings of thought are wrong or evil. You may have an impulse to kill someone. But you are aware of it in the next instant, you realize that killing is wrong, so you stop and refrain. Is there harm in this? What do you think? Or if you have a thought about stealing something and that is followed by a stronger recollection that to do so is wrong, and so you refrain from acting on it - is that bad kamma? It's not that every time you have an impulse you instantly accumulate bad kamma. Otherwise, how could there be any way to liberation? Impulses are merely impulses. Thoughts are merely thoughts. In the first instance, you haven't created anything yet. In the second instance, if you act on it with body, speech or mind, then you are creating something. *Avijjā* has taken control. If you have the impulse to steal and then you are aware of yourself and aware that this would be wrong, this is wisdom, and there is *vijjā* instead. The mental impulse is not consummated.

This is timely awareness, wisdom arising and informing our experience. If there is the first mind-moment of wanting to steal something and then we act on it, that is the dhamma of delusion; the actions of body, speech and mind that follow the impulse will bring negative results.

This is how it is. Merely having the thoughts is not negative kamma. If we don't have any thoughts, how will wisdom develop? Some people simply want to sit with a blank mind. That's wrong understanding.

I'm talking about *samādhi* that is accompanied by wisdom. In fact, the Buddha didn't wish for a lot of *samādhi*. He didn't want *jhāna* and *samāpatti*. He saw *samādhi* as one component factor of the path. *Sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* are components or ingredients, like ingredients used in cooking. We use spices in cooking to make food tasty. The point isn't the spices themselves, but the food we eat. Practising *samādhi* is the same. The Buddha's teachers, Uddaka and Ālāra, put heavy emphasis on practising the *jhāna*, and attaining various kinds of powers like clairvoyance. But if you get that far, it's hard to undo. Some places teach this deep tranquillity, to sit with delight in quietude. The meditators then get intoxicated by their *samādhi*. If they have *sīla*, they get intoxicated by their *sīla*. If they walk the path, they become intoxicated by

the path, dazzled by the beauty and wonders they experience, and they don't reach the real destination.

The Buddha said that this is a subtle error. Still, it's correct for those on a coarse level. But actually what the Buddha wanted was for us to have an appropriate measure of samādhi, without getting stuck there. After we train in and develop samādhi, then samādhi should develop wisdom.

Samādhi that is on the level of samatha - tranquillity - is like a rock covering grass. In samādhi that is sure and stable, even when the eyes are opened, wisdom is there. When wisdom has been born, it encompasses and knows ('rules') all things. So the Teacher did not want those refined levels of concentration and cessation, because they become a diversion and then one forgets the path.

So it is necessary not to be attached to sitting or any other particular posture. Samādhi doesn't reside in having the eyes closed, the eyes open, or in sitting, standing, walking or lying down. Samādhi pervades all postures and activities. Older persons, who often can't sit very well, can contemplate especially well and practise samādhi easily; they too can develop a lot of wisdom.

How is it that they can develop wisdom? Everything is rousing them. When they open their eyes, they don't see things as clearly as they used to. Their teeth give them trouble and fall out. Their bodies ache most of the time. Just that is the place of study. So really, meditation is easy for old folks.

Meditation is hard for youngsters. Their teeth are strong, so they can enjoy their food. They sleep soundly. Their faculties are intact and the world is fun and exciting to them, so they get deluded in a big way. When the old ones chew on something hard they're soon in pain. Right there the *devadūta* are talking to them; they're teaching them every day. When they open their eyes their sight is fuzzy. In the morning their backs ache. In the evening their legs hurt. That's it! This is really an excellent subject to study. Some of you older people will say you can't meditate. What do you want to meditate on? Who will you learn meditation from?

This is seeing the body in the body and sensation in sensation. Are you seeing these or are you running away? Saying you can't practise because you're too old is only due to wrong understanding. The question is, are things clear to you? Elderly persons have a lot of thinking, a lot of sensation, a lot of discomfort and pain. Everything appears! If they meditate, they can really testify to it. So I say that meditation is easy for old folks. They can do it best. Everyone says 'When I'm old, I'll go to the monastery.' If you understand this, it's true all right. You have to see it within yourself. When you sit, it's true; when you stand up, it's true; when you walk, it's true. Everything is a

hassle, everything is presenting obstacles - and everything is teaching you. Isn't this so? Can you just get up and walk away so easily now? When you stand up, it's 'Oy!' Or haven't you noticed? And it's 'Oy!' when you walk. It's prodding you.

When you're young you can just stand up and walk, going on your way. But you don't really know anything. When you're old, every time you stand up it's 'Oy!' Isn't that what you say? 'Oy! Oy!' Every time you move, you learn something. So how can you say it's difficult to meditate? Where else is there to look? It's all correct. The *devadūta* are telling you something. It's most clear. *Sankhārā* are telling you that they are not stable or permanent, not you or yours. They are telling you this every moment.

But we think differently. We don't think that this is right. We entertain wrong view and our ideas are far from the truth. But actually, old people can see impermanence, suffering and lack of self, and give rise to dispassion and disenchantment - because the evidence is right there within them all the time. I think that's good.

Having the inner sensitivity that is always aware of right and wrong is called *Buddho*. It's not necessary to be continually repeating '*Buddho*'. You've counted the fruit in your basket. Every time you sit down, you don't have to go to the trouble of spilling out the fruit and counting it again. You can leave it in the basket. But someone with mistaken attachment will keep counting. He'll stop under a tree, spill it out and count, and put it back in the basket. Then he'll walk on to the next stopping place and do it again. But he's just counting the same fruit. This is craving itself. He's afraid that if he doesn't count, there will be some mistake. We are afraid that if we don't keep saying '*Buddho*', we'll be mistaken. How are we mistaken? Only the person who doesn't know how much fruit there is needs to count. Once you know, you can take it easy and just leave it in the basket. When you're sitting, you just sit. When you're lying down, you just lie down because your fruit is all there with you.

By practising virtue and creating merit, we say, '*Nibbāna paccayo hotu*', (may it be a condition for realizing Nibbāna). As a condition for realizing Nibbāna, making offerings is good. Keeping precepts is good. Practising meditation is good. Listening to Dhamma teachings is good. May they become conditions for realizing Nibbāna.

But what is Nibbāna all about anyway? Nibbāna means not grasping. Nibbāna means not giving meaning to things. Nibbāna means letting go. Making offerings and doing meritorious deeds, observing moral precepts, and meditating on loving-kindness: all these are for getting rid of defilements and craving, for not wishing for anything, not wishing to be, or become anything;

for making the mind empty - empty of self-cherishing, empty of concepts of self and other.

Nibbāna paccayo hotu: make it become a cause for Nibbāna. Practising generosity is giving up, letting go. Listening to teachings is for the purpose of gaining knowledge to give up and let go, to uproot clinging to what is good and to what is bad. At first we meditate to become aware of the wrong and the bad. When we recognize that, we give it up and we practise what is good. Then, when some good is achieved, don't get attached to that good. Remain halfway in the good, or above the good - don't dwell under the good. If we are under the good, then the good pushes us around, and we become slaves to it. We become slaves, and it forces us to create all sorts of kamma and demerit. It can lead us into anything, and the result will be the same kind of unhappiness and unfortunate circumstances we found ourselves in before.

Give up evil and develop merit - give up the negative and develop what is positive. Developing merit, remain above merit. Remain above merit and demerit, above good and evil. Keep on practising with a mind that is giving up, letting go and getting free. It's the same no matter what you are doing: if you do it with a mind of letting go it is a cause for realizing Nibbāna. What you do free of desire, free of defilement, free of craving, all merges with the path, meaning Noble Truth, meaning *saccadhamma*. The Four Noble Truths are having the wisdom that knows *tanhā*, which is the source of *dukkha*. *Kāmatanhā*, *bhavatanhā*, *vibhavatanhā*: these are the origination, the source. If you are wishing for anything or wanting to be anything, you are nourishing *dukkha*, bringing *dukkha* into existence, because this is what gives birth to *dukkha*. These are the causes. If we create the causes of *dukkha*, then *dukkha* will come about. The cause is *vibhavatanhā*: this restless, anxious craving. One becomes a slave to desire and creates all sorts of kamma and wrongdoing because of it, and thus suffering is born. Simply speaking, *dukkha* is the child of desire. Desire is the parent of *dukkha*. When there are parents, *dukkha* can be born. When there are no parents, *dukkha* can not come about - there will be no offspring.

This is where meditation should be focused. We should see all the forms of *tanhā*, which cause us to have desires. But talking about desire can be confusing. Some people get the idea that any kind of desire, such as desire for food and the material requisites for life, is *tanhā*. But we can have this kind of desire in an ordinary and natural way. When you're hungry and desire food, you can take a meal and be done with it. That's quite ordinary. This is desire that's within boundaries and doesn't have ill effects. This kind of desire isn't sensuality. If it's sensuality, then it becomes something more than desire. There will be craving for more things to consume, seeking out flavours,

seeking enjoyment in ways that bring hardship and trouble, such as drinking liquor and beer.

Some tourists told me about a place where people eat live monkeys' brains. They put a monkey in the middle of the table and cut open its skull. Then they spoon out the brain to eat. That's eating like demons or hungry ghosts. It's not eating in a natural or ordinary way. Doing things like this, eating becomes *tanhā*. They say that the blood of monkeys makes them strong. So they try to get hold of such animals and when they eat them they're drinking liquor and beer too. This isn't ordinary eating. It's the way of ghosts and demons mired in sensual craving. It's eating coals, eating fire, eating everything everywhere. This sort of desire is what is *tanhā*. There is no moderation. Speaking, thinking, dressing, everything such people do goes to excess. If our eating, sleeping, and other necessary activities are done in moderation, there is no harm in them. So you should be aware of yourselves in regard to these things; then they won't become a source of suffering. If we know how to be moderate and thrifty in our needs, we can be comfortable.

Practising meditation and creating merit and virtue are not really such difficult things to do, provided we understand them well. What is wrongdoing? What is merit? Merit is what is good and beautiful, not harming ourselves or others with our thinking, speaking, and acting. If we do this, there is happiness. Nothing negative is being created. Merit is like this. Skilfulness is like this.

It's the same with making offerings and giving charity. When we give, what is it that we are trying to give away? Giving is for the purpose of destroying self-cherishing, the belief in a self along with selfishness. Selfishness is powerful, extreme suffering. Selfish people always want to be better than others and to get more than others. A simple example is how, after they eat, they don't want to wash their dishes. They let someone else do it. If they eat in a group, they will leave it to the group. After they eat, they take off. This is selfishness, not being responsible, and it puts a burden on others. What it really amounts to is someone who doesn't care about himself, who doesn't help himself and who really doesn't love himself. In practising generosity, we are trying to cleanse our hearts of this attitude. This is called creating merit through giving, in order to have a mind of compassion and caring towards all living beings without exception.

If we can be free of just this one thing, selfishness, then we will be like the Lord Buddha. He wasn't out for himself, but sought the good of all. If we have the path and fruit arising in our hearts like this we can certainly progress. With this freedom from selfishness, all the activities of virtuous deeds, generosity, and meditation will lead to liberation. Whoever practises like this

will become free and go beyond - beyond all convention and appearance.

The basic principles of practice are not beyond our understanding. For example, if we lack wisdom, when practising generosity, there won't be any merit. Without understanding, we think that generosity merely means giving things. 'When I feel like giving, I'll give. If I feel like stealing something, I'll steal it. Then if I feel generous, I'll give something.' It's like having a barrel full of water. You scoop out a bucketful, and then you pour back in a bucketful. Scoop it out again, pour it in again, scoop it out and pour it in - like this. When will you empty the barrel? Can you see an end to it? Can you see such practice becoming a cause for realizing Nibbāna? Will the barrel become empty? One scoop out, one scoop in - can you see when it will be finished?

Going back and forth like this is *vatta*, the cycle itself. If we're talking about really letting go, giving up good as well as evil, there's only scooping out. Even if there's only a little bit, you scoop it out. You don't put in anything more, and you keep scooping out. Even if you only have a small scoop to use, you do what you can and in this way the time will come when the barrel is empty. If you're scooping out a bucket and pouring back a bucket, scooping out and then pouring back - well, think about it. When will you see an empty barrel? This Dhamma isn't something distant. It's right here in the barrel. You can do it at home. Try it. Can you empty a water barrel like that? Do it all day tomorrow and see what happens.

'Giving up all evil, practising what is good, purifying the mind.' We give up wrongdoing first, and then start to develop the good. What is the good and meritorious? Where is it? It's like fish in the water. If we scoop all the water out, we'll get the fish - that's a simple way to put it. If we scoop out and pour back in, the fish remain in the barrel. If we don't remove all forms of wrongdoing, we won't see merit and we won't see what is true and right. Scooping out and pouring back, scooping out and pouring back, we only remain as we are. Going back and forth like this, we only waste our time and whatever we do is meaningless. Listening to teachings is meaningless. Making offerings is meaningless. All our efforts to practise are in vain. We don't understand the principles of the Buddha's way, so our actions don't bear the desired fruit.

When the Buddha taught about practice, he wasn't only talking about something for ordained people. He was talking about practising well, practising correctly. *Supatipanno* means those who practise well.

Ujupatipanno means those who practise directly. *Ñāyapatipanno* means those who practise for the realization of path, fruition and Nibbāna.

Sāmīcipatipanno are those who practise inclined towards truth. It could be anyone. These are the Sangha of true disciples (*sāvaka*) of the Lord Buddha.

Laywomen living at home can be *sāvaka*. Laymen can be *sāvaka*. Bringing these qualities to fulfilment is what makes one a *sāvaka*. One can be a true disciple of the Buddha and realize enlightenment.

Most of us in the Buddhist fold don't have such complete understanding. Our knowledge doesn't go this far. We do our various activities thinking that we will get some kind of merit from them. We think that listening to teachings or making offerings is meritorious. That's what we're told. But someone who gives offerings to 'get' merit is making bad kamma.

You can't quite understand this. Someone who gives in order to get merit has instantly accumulated bad kamma. If you give in order to let go and free the mind, that brings you merit. If you do it to get something, that's bad kamma.

Listening to teachings to really understand the Buddha's way is difficult. The Dhamma becomes hard to understand when the practice that people do - keeping precepts, sitting in meditation, giving - is for getting something in return. We want merit, we want something. Well, if something can be obtained, who gets it? We get it. When that is lost, whose thing is it that's lost? The person who doesn't have something doesn't lose anything. And when it's lost, who suffers over it?

Don't you think that living your life to get things, brings you suffering? Otherwise you can just go on as before trying to get everything. And yet, if we make the mind empty, then we gain everything. Higher realms, Nibbāna and all their accomplishments - we gain all of it. In making offerings, we don't have any attachment or aim; the mind is empty and relaxed. We can let go and put down. It's like carrying a log and complaining it's heavy. If someone tells you to put it down, you'll say, 'If I put it down, I won't have anything.' Well, now you do have something - you have heaviness. But you don't have lightness. So do you want lightness, or do you want to keep carrying? One person says to put it down, the other says he's afraid he won't have anything. They're talking past each other.

We want happiness, we want ease, we want tranquillity and peace. It means we want lightness. We carry the log, and then someone sees us doing this and tells us to drop it. We say we can't because what would we have then? But the other person says that if we drop it, we can get something better. The two have a hard time communicating.

If we make offerings and practise good deeds in order to get something, it doesn't work out. What we get is becoming and birth. It isn't a cause for realizing Nibbāna. Nibbāna is giving up and letting go. Trying to get, to hold on, to give meaning to things, aren't causes for realizing Nibbāna. The Buddha wanted us to look here, at this empty place of letting go. This is

merit. This is skilfulness.

Once we have done practice - any sort of merit and virtue - we should feel that our part is done. We shouldn't carry it any further. We do it for the purpose of giving up defilements and craving. We don't do it for the purpose of creating defilements, craving and attachment. Then where will we go? We don't go anywhere. Our practice is correct and true.

Most of us Buddhists, though we follow the forms of practice and learning, have a hard time understanding this kind of talk. It's because *Māra*, meaning ignorance, meaning craving - the desire to get, to have, and to be - enshrouds the mind. We only find temporary happiness. For example, when we are filled with hatred towards someone it takes over our minds and gives us no peace. We think about the person all the time, thinking what we can do to strike out at him. The thinking never stops. Then maybe one day we get a chance to go to his house and curse him and tell him off. That gives us some release. Does that make an end of our defilements? We found a way to let off steam and we feel better for it. But we haven't rid ourselves of the affliction of anger, have we? There is some happiness in defilement and craving, but it's like this. We're still storing the defilement inside and when the conditions are right, it will flare up again even worse than before. Then we will want to find some temporary release again. Do the defilements ever get finished in this way?

It's similar when someone's spouse or children die, or when people suffer big financial loss. They drink to relieve their sorrow. They go to a movie to relieve their sorrow. Does it really relieve the sorrow? The sorrow actually grows; but for the time being they can forget about what happened so they call it a way to cure their misery. It's like if you have a cut on the bottom of your foot that makes walking painful. Anything that contacts it hurts and so you limp along complaining of the discomfort. But if you see a tiger coming your way, you'll take off and start running without any thought of your cut. Fear of the tiger is much more powerful than the pain in your foot, so it's as if the pain is gone. The fear made it something small.

You might experience problems at work or at home that seem so big. Then you get drunk and in that drunken state of more powerful delusion, those problems no longer trouble you so much. You think it solved your problems and relieved your unhappiness. But when you sober up the old problems are back. So what happened to your solution? You keep suppressing the problems with drink and they keep on coming back. You might end up with cirrhosis of the liver, but you don't get rid of the problems; and then one day you are dead.

There is some comfort and happiness here; it's the happiness of fools. It's the way that fools stop their suffering. There's no wisdom here. These different

confused conditions are mixed in the heart that has a feeling of well-being. If the mind is allowed to follow its moods and tendencies, it feels some happiness. But this happiness is always storing unhappiness within it. Each time it erupts our suffering and despair will be worse. It's like having a wound. If we treat it on the surface but inside it's still infected, it's not cured. It looks okay for a while, but when the infection spreads we have to start cutting. If the inner infection is never cured we can be operating on the surface again and again with no end in sight. What can be seen from the outside may look fine for a while, but inside it's the same as before.

The way of the world is like this. Worldly matters are never finished. So the laws of the world in the various societies are constantly resolving issues. New laws are always being established to deal with different situations and problems. Something is dealt with for a while, but there's always a need for further laws and solutions. There's never the internal resolution, only surface improvement. The infection still exists within, so there's always need for more cutting. People are only good on the surface, in their words and their appearance. Their words are good and their faces look kind, but their minds aren't so good.

When we get on a train and see some acquaintance there we say, 'Oh, how good to see you! I've been thinking about you a lot lately! I've been planning to visit you!' But it's just talk. We don't really mean it. We're being good on the surface, but we're not so good inside. We say the words, but then as soon as we've had a smoke and taken a cup of coffee with him, we split. Then if we run into him one day in the future, we'll say the same things again: 'Hey, good to see you! How have you been? I've been meaning to go visit you, but I just haven't had the time.' That's the way it is. People are superficially good, but they're usually not so good inside.

The great teacher taught Dhamma and Vinaya. It is complete and comprehensive. Nothing surpasses it and nothing in it need be changed or adjusted, because it is the ultimate. It's complete, so this is where we can stop. There's nothing to add or subtract, because it is something of the nature not to be increased or decreased. It is just right. It is true.

So we Buddhists come to hear Dhamma teachings and study to learn these truths. If we know them, then our minds will enter the Dhamma; the Dhamma will enter our minds. Whenever a person's mind enters the Dhamma, that person has well-being, that person has a mind at peace. The mind then has a way to resolve difficulties, but has no way to degenerate. When pain and illness afflict the body, the mind has many ways to resolve the suffering. It can resolve it naturally, understanding this as natural and not falling into depression or fear over it. Gaining something, we don't get lost in delight.

Losing it, we don't get excessively upset, but rather we understand that the nature of all things is that having appeared, they then decline and disappear. With such an attitude we can make our way in the world. We are *lokavidū*, knowing the world clearly. Then *samudaya*, the cause of suffering, is not created, and *tanhā* is not born. There is *vijjā*, knowledge of things as they really are, and it illumines the world. It illumines praise and blame. It illumines gain and loss. It illumines rank and disrepute. It clearly illumines birth, ageing, illness, and death in the mind of the practitioner.

That is someone who has reached the Dhamma. Such people no longer struggle with life and are no longer constantly in search of solutions. They resolve what can be resolved, acting as is appropriate. That is how the Buddha taught: he taught those individuals who could be taught. Those who could not be taught he discarded and let go of. Even had he not discarded them, they were still discarding themselves - so he dropped them. You might get the idea from this that the Buddha must have been lacking in *mettā* to discard people. Hey! If you toss out a rotten mango are you lacking in *mettā*? You can't make any use of it, that's all. There was no way to get through to such people. The Buddha is praised as one with supreme wisdom. He didn't merely gather everyone and everything together in a confused mess. He was possessed of the divine eye and could clearly see all things as they really are. He was the knower of the world.

As the knower of the world he saw danger in the round of *samsāra*. For us who are his followers it's the same. Knowing all things as they are will bring us well-being. Where exactly are those things that cause us to have happiness and suffering? Think about it well. They are only things that we create ourselves. Whenever we create the idea that something is us or ours, we suffer. Things can bring us harm or benefit, depending on our understanding. So the Buddha taught us to pay attention to ourselves, to our own actions and to the creations of our minds. Whenever we have extreme love or aversion to anyone or anything, whenever we are particularly anxious, that will lead us into great suffering. This is important, so take a good look at it. Investigate these feelings of strong love or aversion, and then take a step back. If you get too close, they'll bite. Do you hear this? If you grab at and caress these things, they bite and they kick. When you feed grass to your buffalo, you have to be careful. If you're careful when it kicks out, it won't kick you. You have to feed it and take care of it, but you should be smart enough to do that without getting bitten. Love for children, relatives, wealth and possessions will bite. Do you understand this? When you feed it, don't get too close. When you give it water, don't get too close. Pull on the rope when you need to. This is the way of Dhamma: recognizing impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and lack of self, recognizing the danger and employing caution and restraint in a

mindful way.

Ajahn Tongrat didn't teach a lot; he always told us, 'Be really careful! Be really careful!' That's how he taught. 'Be really careful! If you're not really careful, you'll catch it on the chin!' This is really how it is. Even if he didn't say it, it's still how it is. If you're not really careful, you'll catch it on the chin. Please understand this. It's not someone else's concern. The problem isn't other people loving or hating us. Others far away somewhere don't make us create kamma and suffering. It's our possessions, our homes, our families where we have to pay attention. Or what do you think? These days, where do you experience suffering? Where are you involved in love, hate and fear? Control yourselves, take care of yourselves. Watch out you don't get bitten. If they don't bite they might kick. Don't think that these things won't bite or kick. If you do get bitten, make sure it's only a little bit. Don't get kicked and bitten to pieces. Don't try to tell yourselves there's no danger. Possessions, wealth, fame, loved ones, all these can kick and bite if you're not mindful. If you are mindful you'll be at ease. Be cautious and restrained. When the mind starts grasping at things and making a big deal out of them, you have to stop it. It will argue with you, but you have to put your foot down. Stay in the middle as the mind comes and goes. Put sensual indulgence away on one side; put self-torment away on the other side. Put love to one side, hate to the other side. Put happiness to one side, suffering to the other side. Remain in the middle without letting the mind go in either direction.

Like these bodies of ours - earth, water, fire and wind - where is the person? There isn't any person. These few different things are put together and it's called a person. That's a falsehood. It's not real; it's only real in the way of convention. When the time comes the elements return to their old state. We've only come to stay with them for a while so we have to let them return. The part that is earth, send back to be earth. The part that is water, send back to be water. The part that is fire, send back to be fire. The part that is wind, send back to be wind. Or will you try to go with them and keep something? We come to rely on them for a while; when it's time for them to go, let them go. When they come, let them come. All these phenomena, *sabhāva*, appear and then disappear. That's all. We understand that all these things are flowing, constantly appearing and disappearing.

Making offerings, listening to teachings, practising meditation, whatever we do should be done for the purpose of developing wisdom. Developing wisdom is for the purpose of liberation, freedom from all these conditions and phenomena. When we are free, then no matter what our situation is, we don't have to suffer. If we have children, we don't have to suffer. If we work, we don't have to suffer. If we have a house, we don't have to suffer. It's like a

lotus in the water. 'I grow in the water, but I don't suffer because of the water. I can't be drowned or burned, because I live in the water.' When the water ebbs and flows it doesn't affect the lotus. The water and the lotus can exist together without conflict. They are together yet separate. Whatever is in the water nourishes the lotus and helps it grow into something beautiful.

It's the same for us. Wealth, home, family, and all defilements of mind no longer defile us but rather help us develop *pāramī*, the spiritual perfections. In a grove of bamboo the old leaves pile up around the trees and when the rain falls they decompose and become fertilizer. Shoots grow and the trees develop, because of the fertilizer, and we have a source of food and income. But it didn't look like anything good at all. So be careful - in the dry season, if you set fires in the forest, they'll burn up all the future fertilizer, and the fertilizer will turn into fire that burns the bamboo. Then you won't have any bamboo shoots to eat. So if you burn the forest, you burn the bamboo fertilizer. If you burn the fertilizer, you burn the trees and the grove dies.

Do you understand? You and your families can live in happiness and harmony with your homes and possessions, free of danger from floods or fire. If a family is flooded or burned, it is only because of the people in that family. It's just like the bamboo's fertilizer. The grove can be burned because of it, or the grove can grow beautifully because of it.

Things will grow beautifully and then not beautifully and then become beautiful again. Growing and degenerating, then growing again and degenerating again - this is the way of worldly phenomena. If we know growth and degeneration for what they are, we can find a conclusion to them. Things grow and reach their limit. Things degenerate and reach their limit. But we remain constant. It's like when there was a fire in Ubon city. People bemoaned the destruction and shed a lot of tears over it. But things were rebuilt after the fire and the new buildings are actually bigger and a lot better than what we had before, and people enjoy the city more now.

This is how it is with the cycles of loss and development. Everything has its limits. So the Buddha wanted us always to be contemplating. While we still live we should think about death. Don't consider it something far away. If you're poor, don't try to harm or exploit others. Face the situation and work hard to help yourself. If you're well off, don't become forgetful in your wealth and comfort. It's not very difficult for everything to be lost. A rich person can become a pauper in a couple of days. A pauper can become a rich person. It's all owing to the fact that these conditions are impermanent and unstable. Thus, the Buddha said, '*pamādo maccuno padam*': heedlessness is the way to death. The heedless are like the dead. Don't be heedless! All beings and all *sankhārā* are unstable and impermanent. Don't form any

attachment to them! Happy or sad, progressing or falling apart, in the end it all comes to the same place. Please understand this.

Living in the world and having this perspective, we can be free of danger. Whatever we may gain or accomplish in the world because of our good kamma, is still of the world and subject to decay and loss; so don't get too carried away by it. It's like a beetle scratching at the earth. It can scratch up a pile that's a lot bigger than itself, but it's still only a pile of dirt. If it works hard it makes a deep hole in the ground, but it's still only a hole in dirt. If a buffalo drops a load of dung there, it will be bigger than the beetle's pile of earth, but it still isn't anything that reaches to the sky. It's all dirt. Worldly accomplishments are like this. No matter how hard the beetles work, they're just involved in dirt, making holes and piles.

People who have good worldly kamma have the intelligence to do well in the world. But no matter how well they do they're still living in the world. All the things they do are worldly and have their limits, like the beetle scratching away at the earth. The hole may go deep, but it's in the earth. The pile may get high, but it's just a pile of dirt. Doing well, getting a lot, we're just doing well and getting a lot in the world.

Please understand this and try to develop detachment. If you don't gain much, be contented, understanding that it's only the worldly. If you gain a lot, understand that it's only the worldly. Contemplate these truths and don't be heedless. See both sides of things, not getting stuck on one side. When something delights you, hold part of yourself back in reserve, because that delight won't last. When you are happy, don't go completely over to its side, because soon enough you'll be back on the other side with unhappiness.

It Can Be Done

At this time please determine your minds to listen to the Dhamma. Today is the traditional day of *dhammasavana*. It is the appropriate time for us, the host of Buddhists, to study the Dhamma in order to increase our mindfulness and wisdom. Giving and receiving the teachings is something we have been doing for a long time. The activities we usually perform on this day, chanting homage to the Buddha, taking moral precepts, meditating and listening to teachings, should be understood as methods and principles for spiritual development. They are not anything more than this.

When it comes to taking precepts, for example, a monk will proclaim the precepts and the laypeople will vow to undertake them. Don't misunderstand what is going on. The truth is that morality is not something that can be given. It can't really be requested or received from someone. We can't give it to someone else. In our vernacular we hear people say, 'The venerable monk gave the precepts' and 'we received the precepts.' We talk like this here in the countryside and so it has become our habitual way of understanding. If we think like this, that we come to receive precepts from the monks on the lunar observance days and that if the monks won't give precepts, then we don't have morality, that is only a tradition of delusion that we have inherited from our ancestors. Thinking in this way means that we give up our own responsibility, not having firm trust and conviction in ourselves. Then it gets passed down to the next generation, and they too come to 'receive' precepts from the monks. And the monks come to believe that they are the ones who 'give' the precepts to the laity. In fact morality and precepts are not like that. They are not something to be 'given' or 'received'; but on ceremonial occasions of making merit and the like we use this as a ritual form according to tradition and employ the terminology.

In truth morality resides with the intentions of people. If you have the conscious determination to refrain from harmful activities and wrongdoing by way of body and speech, morality is coming about within you. You should know it within yourself. It is okay to take the vows with another person. You can also recollect the precepts by yourself. If you don't know what they are, you can request them from someone else. It is not something very complicated or distant. So really whenever we wish to receive morality and Dhamma we have them right then. It is just like the air that surrounds us everywhere. Whenever we breathe we take it in. All manner of good and evil is like that. If we wish to do good, we can do it anywhere, at any time. We can do it alone or together with others. Evil is the same. We can do it with a large or small group, in a hidden or open place. It is like this.

These are things that are already in existence. But morality is something that we should consider normal for all humans to practise. A person who has no morality is no different from an animal. If you decide to live like an animal, then of course there is no good or evil for you, because an animal doesn't have any knowledge of such things. A cat catches mice, but we don't say it is doing evil, because it has no concepts or knowledge of good or bad, right or wrong. These beings are outside the circle of human beings. It is the animal realm. The Buddha pointed out that this group is just living according to the animal kind of kamma. Those who understand right and wrong, good and evil, are humans. The Buddha taught his Dhamma for humans. If we people don't have morality and knowledge of these things, then we are not much different from animals; so it is appropriate that we study and learn about morality and make ourselves able. This is taking advantage of the precious accomplishment of human existence and bringing it to fulfilment.

The profound Dhamma is the teaching that morality is necessary. When there is morality, we have a foundation on which we can progress in Dhamma. Morality means the precepts concerning what is forbidden and what is permissible. Dhamma refers to nature and to humans knowing about nature - how things exist according to nature. Nature is something we do not compose. It exists as it is according to its conditions. A simple example is animals. A certain species, such as peacocks, is born with its various patterns and colours. They were not created like that by humans or modified by humans; they are just born that way according to nature. This is a little example of how it is in nature.

All things of nature are existing in the world - this is still talking about understanding from a worldly viewpoint. The Buddha taught Dhamma for us to know nature, to let go of it and let it exist according to its conditions. This is talking about the external material world. As to *nāmadhamma*, meaning the mind, it can not be left to follow its own conditions. It has to be trained. In the end we can say that mind is the teacher of body and speech, so it needs to be well trained. Letting it go according to its natural urges just makes one an animal. It has to be instructed and trained. It should come to know nature, but should not merely be left to follow nature.

We are born into this world and all of us will naturally have the afflictions of desire, anger and delusion. Desire makes us crave after various things and causes the mind to be in a state of imbalance and turmoil. Nature is like that. It will just not do to let the mind go after these impulses of craving. It only leads to heat and distress. It is better to train in Dhamma, in truth.

When aversion occurs in us we want to express anger towards people; it may even get to the point of physically attacking or killing people. But we don't

just 'let it go' according to its nature. We know the nature of what is occurring. We see it for what it is, and teach the mind about it. This is studying Dhamma.

Delusion is the same. When it happens, we are confused about things. If we just leave it as it is, we remain in ignorance. So the Buddha told us to know nature, to teach nature, to train and adjust nature, to know exactly what nature is.

For example, people are born with physical form and mind. In the beginning these things are born, in the middle they change and in the end they are extinguished. This is ordinary; this is their nature. We can not do much to alter these facts. We train our minds as we can and when the time comes we have to let go of it all. It is beyond the ability of humans to change this or get beyond it. The Dhamma that the Buddha taught is something to be applied while we are here, for making actions, words and thoughts correct and proper. He was teaching the minds of people so that they would not be deluded in regard to nature, conventional reality and supposition. The teacher instructed us to see the world. His Dhamma was a teaching that is above and beyond the world. We are in the world. We were born into this world; he taught us to transcend the world and not to be a prisoner to worldly ways and habits.

It is like a diamond that falls into a muddy pit. No matter how much dirt and filth covers it, that does not destroy its radiance, the hues and the worth of it. Even though the mud is stuck to it, the diamond does not lose anything, but is just as it originally was. There are two separate things.

So the Buddha taught to be above the world, which means knowing the world clearly. By 'the world' he did not mean so much the earth and sky and elements, but rather the mind, the wheel of samsāra. within the hearts of people. He meant this wheel, this world. This is the world the Buddha knew clearly; when we talk about knowing the world clearly we are talking about these things. If it were otherwise, the Buddha would have had to be flying everywhere to 'know the world clearly'. It is not like that. It is a single point. All dhammas come down to one single point; for instance, people - which means men and women. If we observe one man and one woman, we know the nature of all people in the universe. They are not that different.

Another example is learning about heat. If we just know this one point, the quality of being hot, it does not matter what the source or cause of the heat is; the condition of 'hot' is such. If we know clearly this one point, then wherever there may be hotness in the universe, we know it is like this. Because the Buddha knew a single point, his knowledge encompassed the world. Knowing coldness to be a certain way, when he encountered coldness anywhere in the world, he already knew it. He taught a single point for beings

living in the world to know the world, to know the nature of the world, to know people - men and women - to know the manner of existence of beings in the world. His knowledge was such. Knowing one point, he knew all things.

The Dhamma that the teacher expounded was for going beyond suffering. What is this 'going beyond suffering' all about? What should we do to 'escape from suffering'? It is necessary for us to do some study; we need to come and study the thinking and feeling in our hearts. Just that. It is something we are presently unable to change. We can be free of all suffering and unsatisfactoriness in life, just by changing this one point: our habitual world view, our way of thinking and feeling. If we come to have a new sense of things, a new understanding, we transcend the old perceptions and understanding.

The authentic Dhamma of the Buddha is not something pointing far away. It teaches about *attā*, self, and that things are not really self. That is all. All the teachings that the Buddha gave were pointing out that 'this is not a self, this does not belong to a self, there is no such thing as ourselves or others.' Now, when we contact this, we can't really read it, we don't 'translate' the Dhamma correctly. We still think 'this is me, this is mine.' We attach to things and invest them with meaning. When we do this, we can't yet disentangle from them; the involvement deepens and the mess gets worse and worse. If we know that there is no self, that body and mind are really *anattā* as the Buddha taught, then when we keep on investigating, eventually we will come to the realization of the actual condition of selflessness. We will genuinely realize that there is no self or other. Pleasure is merely pleasure. Feeling is merely feeling. Memory is merely memory. Thinking is merely thinking. They are all things that are 'merely' such. Happiness is merely happiness; suffering is merely suffering. Good is merely good, evil is merely evil. Everything exists merely thus. There is no real happiness or real suffering. There are just the merely existing conditions: merely happy, merely suffering, merely hot, merely cold, merely a being or a person. You should keep looking to see that things are only so much. Only earth, only water, only fire, only wind. We should keep on 'reading' these things and investigating this point. Eventually our perception will change; we will have a different feeling about things. The tightly held conviction that there is self and things belonging to self will gradually come undone. When this sense of things is removed, then the opposite perception will keep increasing steadily.

When the realization of *anattā* comes to full measure, we will be able to relate to the things of this world - to our most cherished possessions and involvements, to friends and relations, to wealth, accomplishments and status

- just the same as we do to our clothes. When shirts and pants are new we wear them; they get dirty and we wash them; after some time they are worn out and we discard them. There is nothing out of the ordinary there. We are constantly getting rid of the old things and starting to use new garments.

We will have the exact same feeling about our existence in this world. We will not cry or moan over things. We will not be tormented or burdened by them. They remain the same things as they were before, but our feeling and understanding of them has changed. Now our knowledge will be exalted and we will see truth. We will have attained supreme vision and have learned the authentic knowledge of the Dhamma that we ought to know and to see. Where is the Dhamma that we ought to know and see? It is right here within us, within this body and mind. We have it already; we should come to know and see it.

All of us have been born into this human realm. Whatever we gained by that we are going to lose. We have seen people born and seen them die. We just see this happening, but don't really see clearly. When there is a birth, we rejoice over it; when people die, we cry for them. There is no end. It goes on in this way and there is no end to our foolishness. Seeing birth we are foolhardy. Seeing death we are foolhardy. There is only this unending foolishness. Let's take a look at all this. These things are natural occurrences. Contemplate the Dhamma here, the Dhamma that we should know and see. This Dhamma is existing right now. Make up your minds about this. Exert restraint and self-control. Now we are amidst the things of this life. We shouldn't have fears of death. We should fear the lower realms. Don't fear dying; rather be afraid of falling into hell. You should be afraid of doing wrong while you still have life. These are old things we are dealing with, not new things. Some people are alive but don't know themselves at all. They think, 'What's the big deal about what I do now? I can't know what is going to happen when I die.' They don't think about the new seeds they are creating for the future. They only see the old fruit. They fixate on present experience, not realizing that if there is fruit it must have come from a seed, and that within the fruit we have now are the seeds of future fruit. These seeds are just waiting to be planted. Actions born of ignorance continue the chain in this way, but when you are eating the fruit you don't think about all the implications.

Wherever the mind has a lot of attachment, we will experience intense suffering, intense grief, intense difficulty right there. The place we experience the most problems is the place we have the most attraction, longing and concern. Please try to resolve this. Now, while you still have life and breath, keep on looking at it and reading it until you are able to 'translate' it and solve

the problem.

Whatever we are experiencing as part of our lives now, one day we will be parted from it. So don't just pass the time. Practise spiritual cultivation. Take this parting, this separation and loss as your object of contemplation right now in the present, until you are clever and skilled in it, until you can see that it is ordinary and natural. When there is anxiety and regret over it, have the wisdom to recognize the limits of this anxiety and regret, knowing what they are according to the truth. If you can consider things in this way then wisdom will arise. Whenever suffering occurs, wisdom can arise there, if we investigate. But people generally do not want to investigate.

Wherever pleasant or unpleasant experience happens, wisdom can arise there. If we know happiness and suffering for what they really are, then we know the Dhamma. If we know the Dhamma, we know the world clearly; if we know the world clearly, we know the Dhamma.

Actually, for most of us, if something is displeasing we don't really want to know about it. We get caught up in the aversion to it. If we dislike someone, we don't want to look at his face or get anywhere near him. This is the mark of a foolish, unskilful person; this is not the way of a good person. If we like someone then of course we want to be close to him, we make every effort to be with him, taking delight in his company. This also is foolishness. They are actually the same, like the palm and back of the hand. When we turn the hand up and see the palm, the back of the hand is hidden from sight. When we turn it over then the palm is not seen. Pleasure hides pain and pain hides pleasure from our sight. Wrong covers up right, right covers wrong. Just looking at one side our knowledge is not complete. Let's do things completely while we still have life. Keep on looking at things, separating truth from falsehood, noting how things really are, getting to the end of it, reaching peace. When the time comes we will be able to cut through and let go completely. Now we have to firmly attempt to separate things - and keep trying to cut through.

The Buddha taught about hair, nails, skin and teeth. He taught us to separate them. A person who does not know about separating only knows about holding them to himself. Now while we have not yet parted from these things we should be skilful in meditating on them. We have not yet left this world, so we should be careful. We should contemplate a lot, make copious charitable offerings, recite the scriptures a lot, practise a lot. We should develop insight into impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and selflessness. Even if the mind does not want to listen, we should keep on breaking things up like this and come to know in the present. This can most definitely be done. One can realize knowledge that transcends the world. We are stuck in the world. This is a way to 'destroy' the world, through contemplating and seeing beyond the

world so that we can transcend the world in our being. Even while we are living in this world our view can be above the world.

In a worldly existence one creates both good and evil. Now we try to practise virtue and give up evil. When good results come, then you should not be under that good, but be able to transcend it. If you do not transcend it, then you become a slave to virtue and to your concepts of what is good. It puts you in difficulty, and there will not be an end to your tears. It does not matter how much good you have practised, if you are attached to it then you are still not free and there will be no end to tears. But one who transcends good as well as evil has no more tears to shed. They have dried up. There can be an end. We should learn to use virtue, not to be used by virtue.

In a nutshell, the point of the teaching of the Buddha is to transform one's view. It is possible to change it. It only requires looking at things and then it happens. Having been born we will experience ageing, illness, death and separation. These things are right here. We don't need to look up at the sky or down at the earth. The Dhamma that we need to see and to know can be seen right here within us, every moment of every day. When there is a birth, we are filled with joy. When there is a death, we grieve. That's how we spend our lives. These are the things we need to know about, but we still have not really looked into them and seen the truth. We are stuck deep in this ignorance. We ask, 'When will we see the Dhamma?' - but it is right here to be seen in the present.

This is the Dhamma we should learn about and see. This is what the Buddha taught about. He did not teach about gods and demons and *nāga*, protective deities, jealous demigods, nature spirits and the like. He taught the things that one should know and see. These are truths that we really should be able to realize. External phenomena are like this, exhibiting the *three characteristics*.

If we really take an interest in all of this and contemplate seriously we can gain genuine knowledge. If this were something that could not be done, the Buddha would not have bothered to talk about it. How many tens and hundreds of thousands of his followers have come to realization? If one is really keen on looking at things, one can come to know. The Dhamma is like that. We are living in this world. The Buddha wanted us to know the world. Living in the world, we gain our knowledge from the world. The Buddha is said to be *lokavidū*, one who knows the world clearly. It means living in the world but not being stuck in the ways of the world, living among attraction and aversion but not stuck in attraction and aversion. This can be spoken about and explained in ordinary language. This is how the Buddha taught.

Normally we speak in terms of *attā*, self, talking about me and mine, you and yours, but the mind can remain uninterruptedly in the realization of *anattā*,

selflessness. Think about it. When we talk to children we speak in one way; when dealing with adults we speak in another way. If we use words appropriate to children to speak with adults, or use adults' words to speak with children, it won't work out. We have to know the proper use of conventions when we are talking to children. It can be appropriate to talk about me and mine, you and yours and so forth, but inwardly the mind is Dhamma, dwelling in realization of *anattā*. You should have this kind of foundation.

So the Buddha said that you should take the Dhamma as your foundation, basis and practice, when living in the world. It is not right to take your ideas, desires and opinions as a basis. The Dhamma should be your standard. If you take yourself as the standard you become self-absorbed. If you take someone else as your standard you are merely infatuated with that person. Being enthralled with ourselves or with another person is not the way of Dhamma. The Dhamma does not incline to any person or follow personalities. It follows the truth. It does not simply accord with the likes and dislikes of people; such habitual reactions have nothing to do with the truth of things.

If we really consider all of this and investigate thoroughly to know the truth, then we will enter the correct path. Our way of living will become correct. Thinking will be correct. Our actions and speech will be correct. So we really should look into all of this. Why is it that we have suffering? Because of lack of knowledge, not knowing where things begin and end, not understanding the causes; this is ignorance. When there is this ignorance then various desires arise, and being driven by them we create the causes of suffering. Then the result must be suffering. When you gather firewood and light a match to it, expecting not to have any heat, what are your chances? You are creating a fire, aren't you? This is origination itself.

If you understand these things, morality will be born here. Dhamma will be born here. So prepare yourselves. The Buddha advised us to prepare ourselves. You needn't have too many concerns or anxieties about things. Just look here. Look at the place without desires, the place without danger. The Buddha taught '*Nibbāna paccayo hotu*' - let it be a cause for Nibbāna. If it will be a cause for realization of Nibbāna, it means looking at the place where things are empty, where things are done with, where they reach their end, where they are exhausted. Look at the place where there are no more causes, where there is no more self or other, me or mine. This looking becomes a cause or condition, a condition for attaining Nibbāna. Practising generosity becomes a cause for realizing Nibbāna. Practising morality becomes a cause for realizing Nibbāna. Listening to the teachings becomes a cause for realizing Nibbāna. Thus we can dedicate all our Dhamma activities to become

causes for Nibbāna. But if we are not looking towards Nibbāna, if we are looking at self and other and attachment and grasping without end, this does not become a cause for Nibbāna.

When we deal with others and they talk about self, about me and mine, about what is ours, we immediately agree with this viewpoint. We immediately think, 'Yeah, that's right!' But it's not right. Even if the mind is saying, 'Right, right,' we have to exert control over it. It's the same as a child who is afraid of ghosts. Maybe the parents are afraid too. But it won't do for the parents to talk about it; if they do, the child will feel he has no protection or security. 'No, of course Daddy is not afraid. Don't worry, Daddy is here. There are no ghosts. There's nothing to worry about.' Well the father might really be afraid too. If he starts talking about it, they will all get so worked up about ghosts that they'll jump up and run away - father, mother and child - and end up homeless.

This is not being clever. You have to look at things clearly and learn how to deal with them. Even when you feel that deluded appearances are real, you have to tell yourself that they are not. Go against it like this. Teach yourself inwardly. When the mind is experiencing the world in terms of self, saying, 'It's true,' you have to be able to tell it, 'It's not true.' You should be floating above the water, and not be submerged by the flood-waters of worldly habit. The water is flooding our hearts if we run after things; do we ever look at what is going on? Will there be anyone 'watching the house'?

Nibbāna paccayo hotu - one need not aim at anything or wish for anything at all. Just aim for Nibbāna. All manner of becoming and birth, merit and virtue in the worldly way, do not lead there. We don't need to be wishing for a lot of things, making merit and skilful kamma, hoping it will cause us to attain to some better state, just aim directly for Nibbāna. Wanting sīla, wanting tranquillity, we just end up in the same old place. It's not necessary to desire these things - we should just wish for the place of cessation.

It is like this. Throughout all our becoming and birth, all of us are so terribly anxious about so many things. When there is separation, when there is death, we cry and lament. I can only think, how utterly foolish this is. What are we crying about? Where do you think people are going anyhow? If they are still bound up in becoming and birth they are not really going away. When children grow up and move to the big city of Bangkok they still think of their parents. They won't be missing someone else's parents, just their own. When they return they will go to their parents' home, not someone else's. And when they go away again they will still think about their home here in Ubon. Will they be homesick for some other place? What do you think? So when the breath ends and we die, no matter through how many lifetimes, if the causes

for becoming and birth still exist, the consciousness is likely to try and take birth in a place it is familiar with. I think we are just too fearful about all of this. So please don't go crying about it too much. Think about this. '*Kammam satte vibhajati*' - kamma drives beings into their various births - they don't go very far. Spinning back and forth through the round of births, that is all, just changing appearances, appearing with a different face next time, but we don't know it. Just coming and going, going and returning in the loop of samsāra, not really going anywhere. Just staying there. Like a mango that is shaken off the tree, like the snare that does not get the wasps' nest and falls to the ground; it is not going anywhere. It is just staying there. So the Buddha said, '*Nibbāna paccayo hotu*': let your only aim be Nibbāna. Strive hard to accomplish this; don't end up like the mango falling to the ground and going nowhere.

Transform your sense of things like this. If you can change it you will know great peace. Change, please; come to see and know. These are things one should indeed see and know. If you do see and know, then where else do you need to go? Morality will come to be. Dhamma will come to be. It is nothing far away; so please investigate this.

When you transform your view, you will realize that it is like watching leaves fall from the trees. When they get old and dry, they fall from the tree. And when the season comes, they begin to appear again. Would anyone cry when leaves fall, or laugh when they grow? If you did, you would be insane, wouldn't you? It is just this much. If we can see things in this way, we will be okay. We will know that this is just the natural order of things. It doesn't matter how many births we undergo, it will always be like this. When one studies Dhamma, gains clear knowledge and undergoes a change of world view like this, one will realize peace and be free of bewilderment about the phenomena of this life.

But the important point really is that we have life now in the present. We are experiencing the results of past deeds right now. When beings are born into the world, this is the manifestation of past actions. Whatever happiness or suffering beings have in the present is the fruit of what they have done previously. It is born of the past and experienced in the present. Then this present experience becomes the basis for the future as we create further causes under its influence, and so future experience becomes the result. The movement from one birth to the next also happens in this way. You should understand this.

Listening to the Dhamma should resolve your doubts. It should clarify your view of things and alter your way of living. When doubts are resolved, suffering can end. You stop creating desires and mental afflictions. Then

whatever you experience, if something is displeasing to you, you will not suffer over it because you understand its changeability. If something is pleasing to you, you will not get carried away and become intoxicated by it because you know the way to let go of things appropriately. You maintain a balanced perspective, because you understand impermanence and know how to resolve things according to Dhamma. You know that good and bad conditions are always changing. Knowing internal phenomena, you understand external phenomena. Not attached to the external, you are not attached to the internal. Observing things within yourself or outside of yourself, it is all completely the same.

In this way we can dwell in a natural state, which is peace and tranquillity. If we are criticized, we remain undisturbed. If we are praised, we are undisturbed. Let things be in this way; don't be influenced by others. This is freedom. Knowing the two extremes for what they are, one can experience well-being. One does not stop at either side. This is genuine happiness and peace, transcending all things of the world. One transcends all good and evil. One is above cause and effect, beyond birth and death. Born into this world, one can transcend the world. To be beyond the world, knowing the world - this is the aim of the Buddha's teaching. He did not aim for people to suffer. He desired people to attain peace, to know the truth of things and realize wisdom. This is Dhamma, knowing the nature of things. Whatever exists in the world is nature. There is no need to be in confusion about it. Wherever you are, the same laws apply.

The most important point is that while we have life, we should train the mind to be even in regard to things. We should be able to share wealth and possessions. When the time comes we should give a portion to those in need, just as if we were giving things to our own children. Sharing things like this we will feel happy; and if we can give away all our wealth, then whenever our breath may stop, there will be no attachment or anxiety because everything is gone. The Buddha taught to 'die before you die', to be finished with things before they are finished. Then you can be at ease. Let things break before they are broken, let them finish before they are finished. This is the Buddha's intention in teaching the Dhamma. Even if you listen to teachings for a hundred or a thousand aeons, if you do not understand these points, you won't be able to undo your suffering and you will not find peace. You will not see the Dhamma. But understanding these things according to the Buddha's intention and being able to resolve things is called seeing the Dhamma. This view of things can make an end of suffering. It can relieve all heat and distress. Whoever strives sincerely and is diligent in practice, who can endure, who trains and develops themselves to the full measure: those persons will attain to peace and cessation. Wherever they stay, they will have no suffering.

Whether they are young or old they will be free of suffering. Whatever their situation, whatever work they have to perform, they will have no suffering because their minds have reached the place where suffering is exhausted, where there is peace. It is like this. It is a matter of nature.

The Buddha thus said to change one's perceptions, and there will be the Dhamma. When the mind is in harmony with Dhamma, then Dhamma enters the heart. The mind and the Dhamma become indistinguishable. The changing of one's view and experience of things is something to be realized by those who practise. The entire Dhamma is *paccattam*, to be known personally. It can not be given by anyone; that is an impossibility. If we hold it to be difficult, it will be something difficult. If we take it to be easy, it is easy. Whoever contemplates it and sees the one point does not have to know a lot of things. Seeing the one point, seeing birth and death, the arising and passing away of phenomena according to nature, one will know all things. This is a matter of the truth.

This is the way of the Buddha. The Buddha gave his teachings out of the wish to benefit all beings. He wished for us to go beyond suffering and to attain peace. It is not that we have to die first in order to transcend suffering. We shouldn't think that we will attain this after death; we can go beyond suffering here and now, in the present. We transcend within our perception of things, in this very life, through the view that arises in our minds. Then sitting, we are happy; lying down, we are happy; wherever we are, we are happy. We become without fault, experience no ill results, and live in a state of freedom. The mind is clear, bright, and tranquil. There is no more darkness or defilement. This is someone who has reached the supreme happiness of the Buddha's way. Please investigate this for yourselves. All of you lay followers, please contemplate this to gain understanding and ability. If you suffer, then practise to alleviate your suffering. If it is great, make it little, and if it is little, make an end of it. Everyone has to do this for themselves, so please make an effort to consider these words. May you prosper and develop.

Understanding Dukkha

It sticks on the skin and goes into the flesh; from the flesh it gets into the bones. It's like an insect on a tree that eats through the bark, into the wood and then into the core, until finally the tree dies.

We've grown up like that. It gets buried deep inside. Our parents taught us grasping and attachment, giving meaning to things, believing firmly that we exist as a self-entity and that things belong to us. From our birth that's what we are taught. We hear this over and over again, and it penetrates our hearts and stays there as our habitual feeling. We're taught to get things, to accumulate and hold on to them, to see them as important and as ours. This is what our parents know, and this is what they teach us. So it gets into our minds, into our bones.

When we take an interest in meditation and hear the teaching of a spiritual guide it's not easy to understand. It doesn't really grab us. We're taught not to see and to do things the old way, but when we hear the teaching, it doesn't penetrate the mind; we only hear it with our ears. People just don't know themselves.

So we sit and listen to teachings, but it's just sound entering the ears. It doesn't get inside and affect us. It's like we're boxing and we keep hitting the other guy but he doesn't go down. We remain stuck in our self-conceit. The wise have said that moving a mountain from one place to another is easier than moving the self-conceit of people.

We can use explosives to level a mountain and then move the earth. But the tight grasping of our self-conceit - oh man! The wise can teach us to our dying day, but they can't get rid of it. It remains hard and fast. Our wrong ideas and bad tendencies remain so solid and unbudging, and we're not even aware of it. So the wise have said that removing this self-conceit and turning wrong understanding into right understanding is about the hardest thing to do.

For us *puthujjana* to progress on to being *kalyāṇajana* is so hard. *Puthujjana* means people who are thickly obscured, who are in the dark, who are stuck deep in this darkness and obscurity. The *kalyāṇajana* has made things lighter. We teach people to lighten, but they don't want to do that because they don't understand their situation, their condition of obscurity. So they keep on wandering in their confused state.

If we come across a pile of buffalo dung we won't think it's ours and we won't want to pick it up. We will just leave it where it is because we know what it is. That's what's good in the way of the impure. Evil is the food of bad people. If you teach them about doing good they're not interested, but prefer

to stay as they are because they don't see the harm in it. Without seeing the harm there's no way things can be rectified. If you recognize it, then you think, 'Oh! My whole pile of dung doesn't have the value of a small piece of gold!' And then you will want gold instead; you won't want the dung anymore. If you don't recognize this, you remain the owner of a pile of dung. Even if you are offered a diamond or a ruby, you won't be interested.

That's the 'good' of the impure. Gold, jewels and diamonds are considered something good in the realm of humans. The foul and rotten is good for flies and other insects. If you put perfume on it they would all flee. What those with wrong view consider good is like that. That's the 'good' for those with wrong view, for the defiled. It doesn't smell good, but if we tell them it stinks they'll say it's fragrant. They can't reverse this view very easily. So it's not easy to teach them.

If you gather fresh flowers the flies won't be interested in them. Even if you tried to pay them, they wouldn't come. But wherever there's a dead animal, wherever there's something rotten, that's where they'll go. You don't need to call them - they just go. Wrong view is like that. It delights in that kind of thing. The stinking and rotten is what smells good to it. It's bogged down and immersed in that. What's sweet smelling to a bee is not sweet to a fly. The fly doesn't see anything good or valuable in it and has no craving for it.

There is difficulty in practice, but in anything we undertake we have to pass through difficulty to reach ease. In Dhamma practice we begin with the truth of *dukkha*, the pervasive unsatisfactoriness of existence. But as soon as we experience this we lose heart. We don't want to look at it. *Dukkha* is really the truth, but we want to get around it somehow. It's similar to the way we don't like to look at old people, but prefer to look at those who are young.

If we don't want to look at *dukkha* we will never understand *dukkha*, no matter how many births we go through. *Dukkha* is a noble truth. If we allow ourselves to face it, we will start to seek a way out of it. If we are trying to go somewhere and the road is blocked we will think about how to make a pathway. Working at it day after day we can get through. When we encounter problems we develop wisdom like this. Without seeing *dukkha* we don't really look into and resolve our problems; we just pass them by indifferently.

My way of training people involves some suffering, because suffering is the Buddha's path to enlightenment. He wanted us to see suffering and to see origination, cessation and the path. This is the way out for all the ariya, the awakened ones. If you don't go this way there is no way out. The only way is knowing suffering, knowing the cause of suffering, knowing the cessation of suffering and knowing the path of practice leading to the cessation of suffering. This is the way that the ariya, beginning with stream entry, were

able to escape. It's necessary to know suffering.

If we know suffering, we will see it in everything we experience. Some people feel that they don't really suffer much. Practice in Buddhism is for the purpose of freeing ourselves from suffering. What should we do not to suffer anymore? When *dukkha* arises we should investigate to see the causes of its arising. Then once we know that, we can practise to remove those causes. Suffering, origination, cessation - in order to bring it to cessation we have to understand the path of practice. Then once we travel the path to fulfilment, *dukkha* will no longer arise. In Buddhism, this is the way out.

Opposing our habits creates some suffering. Generally we are afraid of suffering. If something will make us suffer, we don't want to do it. We are interested in what appears to be good and beautiful, but we feel that anything involving suffering is bad. It's not like that. Suffering is *saccadhamma*, truth. If there is suffering in the heart, it becomes the cause that makes you think about escaping. It leads you to contemplate. You won't sleep so soundly because you will be intent on investigating to find out what is really going on, trying to see causes and their results.

Happy people don't develop wisdom. They are asleep. It's like a dog that eats its fill. Afterwards it doesn't want to do anything. It can sleep all day. It won't bark if a burglar comes - it's too full, too tired. But if you only give it a little food it will be alert and awake. If someone tries to come sneaking around, it will jump up and start barking. Have you seen that?

We humans are trapped and imprisoned in this world and have troubles in such abundance, and we are always full of doubts, confusion and worry. This is no game. It's really something difficult and troublesome. So there's something we need to get rid of. According to the way of spiritual cultivation we should give up our bodies, give up ourselves. We have to resolve to give our lives. We can see the example of great renunciants, such as the Buddha. He was a noble of the warrior caste, but he was able to leave it all behind and not turn back. He was the heir to riches and power, but he could renounce them.

If we speak the subtle Dhamma, most people will be frightened by it. They won't dare to enter it. Even saying, 'Don't do evil,' most people can't follow this. That's how it is. So I've sought all kinds of means to get this across. One thing I often say is, no matter if we are delighted or upset, happy or suffering, shedding tears or singing songs, never mind - living in this world we are in a cage. We don't get beyond this condition of being in a cage. Even if you are rich, you are living in a cage. If you are poor, you are living in a cage. If you sing and dance, you're singing and dancing in a cage. If you watch a movie, you're watching it in a cage.

What is this cage? It is the cage of birth, the cage of ageing, the cage of illness, the cage of death. In this way, we are imprisoned in the world. 'This is mine.' 'That belongs to me.' We don't know what we really are or what we're doing. Actually all we are doing is accumulating suffering for ourselves. It's not something far away that causes our suffering, but we don't look at ourselves. However much happiness and comfort we may have, having been born we can not avoid ageing, we must fall ill and we must die. This is *dukkha* itself, here and now.

We can always be afflicted with pain or illness. It can happen at any time. It's like we've stolen something. They could come to arrest us at any time because we've done the deed. That's our situation. There is danger and trouble. We exist among harmful things; birth, ageing and illness reign over our lives. We can't go elsewhere and escape them. They can come catch us at any time - it's always a good opportunity for them. So we have to cede this to them and accept the situation. We have to plead guilty. If we do, the sentence won't be so heavy. If we don't, we suffer enormously. If we plead guilty, they'll go easy on us. We won't be incarcerated too long.

When the body is born it doesn't belong to anyone. It's like our meditation hall. After it's built spiders come to stay in it. Lizards come to stay in it. All sorts of insects and crawling things come to stay in it. Snakes may come to live in it. Anything may come to live in it. It's not only our hall; it's everything's hall.

These bodies are the same. They aren't ours. People come to stay in and depend on them. Illness, pain and ageing come to reside in them and we are merely residing along with them. When these bodies reach the end of pain and illness, and finally break up and die, that is not us dying. So don't hold on to any of this. Instead, you have to contemplate the matter and then your grasping will gradually be exhausted. When you see correctly, wrong understanding will stop.

Birth has created this burden for us. But generally, we can't accept this. We think that not being born would be the greatest evil. Dying and not being born would be the worst thing of all. That's how we view things. We usually only think about how much we want in the future. And then we desire further: 'In the next life, may I be born among the gods, or may I be born as a wealthy person.'

We're asking for an even heavier burden! But we think that that will bring happiness. Such thinking is an entirely different way from what the Buddha teaches. That way is heavy. The Buddha said to let go of it and cast it away. But we think, 'I can't let go.' So we keep carrying it and it keeps getting heavier. Because we were born we have this heaviness. To really penetrate the

Dhamma purely is thus very difficult. We need to rely on serious investigation.

Going a little further, do you know if craving has its limits? At what point will it be satisfied? Is there such a thing? If you consider it you will see that *tanhā*, blind craving, can't be satisfied. It keeps on desiring more and more; even if this brings such suffering that we are nearly dead, *tanha* will keep on wanting things because it can't be satisfied.

This is something important. If we could think in a balanced and moderate way - well, let's talk about clothes. How many sets do we need? And food - how much do we eat? At the most, for one meal we might eat two plates and that should be enough for us. If we know moderation, we will be happy and comfortable, but this is not very common.

The Buddha taught 'instructions for the rich'. What this teaching points to is being content with what we have. One who is content is a rich person. I think this kind of knowledge is really worth studying. The knowledge taught in the Buddha's way is something worth learning, worth reflecting on.

Then, the pure Dhamma of practice goes beyond that. It's a lot deeper. Some of you may not be able to understand it. Just take the Buddha's words that there is no more birth for him, that birth and becoming are finished. Hearing this makes you uncomfortable. To state it directly, the Buddha said that we should not be born, because that is suffering. Just this one thing, birth, the Buddha focused on, contemplating it and realizing its gravity. All *dukkha* comes along with being born. It happens simultaneously with birth. When we come into this world we get eyes, a mouth, a nose. It all comes along only because of birth. But if we hear about dying and not being born again, we feel it would be utter ruination. We don't want to go there. But the deepest teaching of the Buddha is like this.

Why are we suffering now? Because we were born. So we are taught to put an end to birth. This is not just talking about the body being born and the body dying. That much is easy to see. A child can understand it. The breath comes to an end, the body dies and then it just lies there. This is what we usually mean when we talk about death. But a breathing dead person? That's something we don't know about. A dead person who can walk and talk and smile is something we haven't thought about. We only know about the corpse that's no longer breathing. That's what we call death.

It's the same with birth. When we say someone has been born, we mean that a woman went to the hospital and gave birth. But the moment of the mind taking birth - have you noticed that, such as when you get upset over something at home? Sometimes love is born. Sometimes aversion is born.

Being pleased, being displeased - all sorts of states. This is all nothing but birth.

We suffer just because of this. When the eyes see something displeasing, *dukkha* is born. When the ears hear something that you really like, *dukkha* is also born. There is only suffering.

The Buddha summed it up by saying that there is only a mass of suffering. Suffering is born and suffering ceases. That's all there is. We pounce on and grab at it again and again - pouncing on arising, pouncing on cessation, never really understanding it.

When *dukkha* arises we call that suffering. When it ceases we call that happiness. It's all old stuff, arising and ceasing. We are taught to watch body and mind arising and ceasing. There's nothing else outside of this. To sum it up, there is no happiness; there's only *dukkha*. We recognize suffering as suffering when it arises. Then when it ceases, we consider that to be happiness. We see it and designate it as such, but it isn't. It's just *dukkha* ceasing. *Dukkha* arises and ceases, arises and ceases, and we pounce on it and catch hold of it. Happiness appears and we are pleased. Unhappiness appears and we are distraught. It's really all the same, mere arising and ceasing. When there is arising there's something, and when there is ceasing, it's gone. This is where we doubt. Thus it's taught that *dukkha* arises and ceases, and outside of that, there is nothing. When you come down to it, there is only suffering. But we don't see clearly.

We don't recognize clearly that there is only suffering, because when it stops we see happiness there. We seize on it and get stuck there. We don't really see the truth that everything is just arising and ceasing.

The Buddha summed things up by saying that there is only arising and ceasing, and nothing outside of that. This is difficult to listen to. But one who truly has a feel for the Dhamma doesn't need to take hold of anything and dwells in ease. That's the truth.

The truth is that in this world of ours there is nothing that does anything to anybody. There is nothing to be anxious about. There's nothing worth crying over, nothing to laugh at. Nothing is inherently tragic or delightful. But such experiencing is what's ordinary for people.

Our speech can be ordinary; we relate to others according to the ordinary way of seeing things. That's okay. But if we are thinking in the ordinary way, that leads to tears.

In truth, if we really know the Dhamma and see it continuously, nothing is anything at all; there is only arising and passing away. There's no real

happiness or suffering. The heart is at peace then, when there is no happiness or suffering. When there is happiness and suffering, there is becoming and birth.

We usually create one kind of kamma, which is the attempt to stop suffering and produce happiness. That's what we want. But what we want is not real peace; it's happiness and suffering. The aim of the Buddha's teaching is to practise to create a type of kamma that leads beyond happiness and suffering and that will bring peace. But we aren't able to think like that. We can only think that having happiness will bring us peace. If we have happiness, we think that's good enough.

Thus we humans wish for things in abundance. If we get a lot, that's good. Generally that's how we think. Doing good is supposed to bring good results, and if we get that we're happy. We think that's all we need to do and we stop there. But where does good come to conclusion? It doesn't remain. We keep going back and forth, experiencing good and bad, trying day and night to seize on to what we feel is good.

The Buddha's teaching is that first we should give up evil and then practise what is good. Second, he said that we should give up evil and give up the good as well, not having attachment to it because that is also one kind of fuel. Fuel will eventually burst into flame. Good is fuel. Bad is fuel.

Speaking on this level kills people. People aren't able to follow it. So we have to turn back to the beginning and teach morality. Don't harm each other. Be responsible in your work and don't harm or exploit others. The Buddha taught this, but just this much isn't enough to stop.

Why do we find ourselves here, in this condition? It's because of birth. As the Buddha said in his first teaching, the Discourse on Turning the Wheel of Dhamma: 'Birth is ended. This is my final existence. There is no further birth for the *Tathāgata*.'

Not many people really come back to this point and contemplate to understand according to the principles of the Buddha's way. But if we have faith in the Buddha's way, it will repay us. If people genuinely rely on the Three Jewels, then practice is easy.

The Dhamma Goes Westward

Question: A friend of mine went to practise with a Zen teacher. He asked him, 'When the Buddha was sitting beneath the Bodhi tree, what was he doing?' The Zen master answered, 'He was practising zazen!' My friend said, 'I don't believe it.' The Zen master asked him, 'What do you mean, you don't believe it?' My friend said, 'I asked Goenka the same question and he said, "When the Buddha was sitting under the Bodhi tree, he was practising vipassanā!" So everybody says the Buddha was doing whatever they do.'

Answer: When the Buddha sat out in the open, he was sitting beneath the Bodhi tree. Isn't that so? When he sat under some other kind of tree, he was sitting beneath the Bodhi tree. There's nothing wrong with those explanations. 'Bodhi' means the Buddha himself, the one who knows. It's OK to talk about sitting beneath the Bodhi tree, but lots of birds sit beneath the Bodhi tree. Lots of people sit beneath the Bodhi tree. But they are far from such knowledge, far from such truth. Yes, we can say, 'beneath the Bodhi tree'. Monkeys play in the Bodhi tree. People sit there beneath the Bodhi tree. But this doesn't mean they have any profound understanding. Those who have deeper understanding realize that the true meaning of the 'Bodhi tree' is the absolute Dhamma.

So in this way it's certainly good for us to try to sit beneath the Bodhi tree. Then we can be Buddha. But we don't need to argue with others over this question. When one person says the Buddha was doing one kind of practice beneath the Bodhi tree and another person disputes that, we needn't get involved. We should be looking at it from the viewpoint of the ultimate, meaning realizing the truth. There is also the conventional idea of 'Bodhi tree', which is what most people talk about; but when there are two kinds of Bodhi tree, people can end up arguing and having the most contentious disputes - and then there is no Bodhi tree at all.

It's talking about *paramatthadhamma*, the level of ultimate truth. So in that case, we can also try to get underneath the Bodhi tree. That's pretty good - then we'll be Buddha. It's not something to be arguing over. When someone says the Buddha was practising a certain kind of meditation beneath the Bodhi tree and someone else says, 'No, that's not right,' we needn't get involved. We're aiming at *paramatthadhamma*, meaning dwelling in full awareness. This ultimate truth pervades everything. Whether the Buddha was sitting beneath the Bodhi tree or performing other activities in other postures, never mind. That's just the intellectual analysis people have developed. One person has one view of the matter, another person has another idea; we don't have to get involved in disputes over it.

Where did the Buddha enter Nibbāna means extinguished without remainder, finished. Being finished comes from knowledge, knowledge of the way things really are. That's how things get finished, and that is the *paramatthadhamma*. There are explanations according to the levels of convention and liberation. They are both true, but their truths are different. For example, we say that you are a person. But the Buddha will say, 'That's not so. There's no such thing as a person.' So we have to summarize the various ways of speaking and explanation into convention and liberation.

We can explain it like this: previously you were a child. Now you are grown up. Are you a new person or the same person as before? If you are the same as the old person, how did you become an adult? If you are a new person, where did you come from? But talking about an old person and a new person doesn't really get to the point. This question illustrates the limitations of conventional language and understanding. If there is something called 'big', then there is 'small'. If there is small there is big. We can talk about small and large, young and old, but there are really no such things in any absolute sense. You can't really say somebody or something is big. The wise do not accept such designations as real, but when ordinary people hear about this, that 'big' is not really true and 'small' is not really true, they are confused because they are attached to concepts of big and small.

You plant a sapling and watch it grow. After a year it is one meter high. After another year it is two meters tall. Is it the same tree or a different tree? If it's the same tree, how did it become bigger? If it's a different tree, how did it grow from the small tree? From the viewpoint of someone who is enlightened to the Dhamma and sees correctly, there is no new or old tree, no big or small tree. One person looks at a tree and thinks it is tall. Another person will say it's not tall. But there is no 'tall' that really exists independently. You can't say someone is big and someone is small, someone is grown up and someone else is young. Things end here and problems are finished with. If we don't get tied up in knots over these conventional distinctions, we won't have doubts about practice.

I've heard of people who worship their deities by sacrificing animals. They kill ducks, chickens and cows and offer them to their gods, thinking that will be pleasing to them. This is wrong understanding. They think they are making merits, but it's the exact opposite: they are actually making a lot of bad kamma. Someone who really looks into this won't think like that. But have you noticed? I'm afraid people in Thailand are becoming like that. They're not applying real investigation.

Q: Is that *vīmamsā*?

A: It means understanding cause and result.

Q: Then the teachings talk about *chanda*, aspiration; *virīya*, exertion; and *citta*, mind; together with *vimamsā* these are the four *iddhipādā*, ‘bases for accomplishment’.

A: When there’s satisfaction, is it with something that is correct? Is exertion correct? *Vīmamsā* has to be present with these other factors.

Q: Are *citta* and *vīmamsā* different?

A: *Vīmamsā* is investigation. It means skilfulness or wisdom. It is a factor of the mind. You can say that *chanda* is mind, *virīya* is mind, *citta* is mind, *vīmamsā* is mind. They are all aspects of mind, they all can be summarized as ‘mind’, but here they are distinguished for the purpose of pointing out these different factors of the mind. If there is satisfaction, we may not know if it is right or wrong. If there is exertion, we don’t know if it’s right or wrong. Is what we call mind the real mind? There has to be *vīmamsā* to discern these things. When we investigate the other factors with wise discernment, our practice gradually comes to be correct and we can understand the Dhamma.

But Dhamma doesn’t bring much benefit if we don’t practise meditation. We won’t really know what it is all about. These factors are always present in the mind of real practitioners. Then even if they go astray, they will be aware of that and be able to correct it. So their path of practice is continuous.

People may look at you and feel your way of life, your interest in Dhamma, makes no sense. Others may say that if you want to practise Dhamma, you ought to be ordained as a monk. Being ordained is not really the crucial point. It’s how you practise. As it’s said, one should be one’s own witness. Don’t take others as your witness. It means learning to trust yourself. Then there is no loss. People may think you are crazy, but never mind. They don’t know anything about Dhamma.

Others’ words can’t measure your practice. And you don’t realize the Dhamma because of what others say. I mean the real Dhamma. The teachings others can give you are to show you the path, but that isn’t real knowledge. When people meet the Dhamma, they realize it specifically within themselves. So the Buddha said, ‘The *Tathāgata* is merely one who shows the way.’ When someone is ordained, I tell them, ‘Our responsibility is only this part: the reciting *ācariya* have done their chanting. I have given you the Going Forth and vows of ordination. Now our job is done. The rest is up to you, to do the practice correctly.’

Teachings can be most profound, but those who listen may not understand. But never mind. Don’t be perplexed over profundity or lack of it. Just do the practice wholeheartedly and you can arrive at real understanding; it will bring you to the same place the teachings are talking about. Don’t rely on the

perceptions of ordinary people. Have you read the story about the blind men and the elephant? It's a good illustration.

Suppose there's an elephant and a bunch of blind people are trying to describe it. One touches the leg and says it's like a pillar. Another touches the ear and says it's like a fan. Another touches the tail and says, 'No, it's not a fan; it's like a broom.' Another touches the shoulder and says it's something else again from what the others say.

It's like this. There's no resolution, no end. Each blind person touches part of the elephant and has a completely different idea of what it is. But it's the same one elephant. It's like this in practice. With a little understanding or experience, you get limited ideas. You can go from one teacher to the next seeking explanations and instructions, trying to figure out if they are teaching correctly or incorrectly and how their teachings compare to each other. Some monks are always travelling around with their bowls and umbrellas learning from different teachers. They try to judge and measure, so when they sit down to meditate they are constantly in confusion about what is right and what is wrong. 'This teacher said this, but that teacher said that. One guy teaches in this way, but the other guy's methods are different. They don't seem to agree.' It can lead to a lot of doubt.

You might hear that certain teachers are really good and so you go to receive teachings from Thai Ajahns, Zen masters and others. It seems to me you've probably had enough teaching, but the tendency is to always want to hear more, to compare and to end up in doubt as a result. Then each successive teacher increases your confusion further. There's a story of a wanderer in the Buddha's time that was in this kind of situation. He went to one teacher after the next, hearing their different explanations and learning their methods. He was trying to learn meditation but was only increasing his perplexity. His travels finally brought him to the teacher Gotama, and he described his predicament to the Buddha.

'Doing as you have been doing will not bring an end to doubt and confusion,' the Buddha told him. 'At this time, let go of the past; whatever you may or may not have done, whether it was right or wrong, let go of that now.

The future has not yet come. Do not speculate over it at all, wondering how things may turn out. Let go of all such disturbing ideas - it is merely thinking.

'Letting go of past and future, look at the present. Then you will know the Dhamma. You may know the words spoken by various teachers, but you still do not know your own mind. The present moment is empty; look only at arising and ceasing of *sankhārā*. See that they are impermanent, unsatisfactory and empty of self. See that they really are thus. Then you will

not be concerned with the past or the future. You will clearly understand that the past is gone and the future has not yet arrived. Contemplating in the present, you will realize that the present is the result of the past. The results of past actions are seen in the present.

‘The future has not yet come. Whatever does occur in the future will arise and pass away in the future; there is no point in worrying over it now, as it has not yet occurred. So contemplate in the present. The present is the cause of the future. If you want a good future, create good in the present, increasing your awareness of what you do in the present. The future is the result of that. The past is the cause and the future is the result of the present.

‘Knowing the present, one knows the past and the future. Then one lets go of the past and the future, knowing they are gathered in the present moment.’

Understanding this, that wanderer made up his mind to practise as the Buddha advised, putting things down. Seeing ever more clearly, he realized many kinds of knowledge, seeing the natural order of things with his own wisdom. His doubts ended. He put down the past and the future and everything appeared in the present. This was *eko dhammo*, the one Dhamma. Then it was no longer necessary for him to carry his begging bowl up mountains and into forests in search of understanding. If he did go somewhere, he went in a natural way, not out of desire for something. If he stayed put, he was staying in a natural way, not out of desire.

Practising in that way, he became free of doubt. There was nothing to add to his practice, nothing to remove. He dwelt in peace, without anxiety over past or future. This was the way the Buddha taught.

But it’s not just a story about something that happened long ago. If we at this time practise correctly, we can also gain realization. We can know the past and the future because they are gathered at this one point, the present moment. If we look to the past we won’t know. If we look to the future we won’t know, because that is not where the truth is; it exists here, in the present.

Thus the Buddha said, ‘I am enlightened through my own efforts, without any teacher.’ Have you read this story? A wanderer of another sect asked him, ‘Who is your teacher?’ The Buddha answered, ‘I have no teacher. I attained enlightenment by myself.’ But that wanderer just shook his head and went away. He thought the Buddha was making up a story and so he had no interest in what he said. He thought it was not possible to achieve anything without a teacher and guide.

It’s like this: you study with a spiritual teacher and he tells you to give up greed and anger. He tells you they are harmful and that you need to get rid of

them. Then you may practise and do that. But getting rid of greed and anger didn't come about just because he taught you; you had to actually practise and do that. Through practice you came to realize something for yourself. You see greed in your mind and give it up. You see anger in your mind and give it up. The teacher doesn't get rid of them for you. He tells you about getting rid of them, but it doesn't happen just because he tells you. You do the practice and come to realization. You understand these things for yourself.

It's like the Buddha is catching hold of you and bringing you to the beginning of the path, and he tells you, 'Here is the path - walk on it.' He doesn't help you walk. You do that yourself. When you do travel the path and practise Dhamma, you meet the real Dhamma, which is beyond anything that anyone can explain to you. So one is enlightened by oneself, understanding past, future and present, understanding cause and result. Then doubt is finished.

We talk about giving up and developing, renouncing and cultivating. But when the fruit of practice is realized, there is nothing to add and nothing to remove. The Buddha taught that this is the point we want to arrive at, but people don't want to stop there. Their doubts and attachments keep them on the move, keep them confused and keep them from stopping there. So when one person has arrived but others are somewhere else, they won't be able to make any sense of what he may say about it. They might have some intellectual understanding of the words, but this is not real understanding or knowledge of the truth.

Usually when we talk about practice we talk about entering and leaving, increasing the positive and removing the negative. But the final result is that all of these are done with. There is the *sekha puggala*, the person who needs to train in these things, and there is the *asekha puggala*, the person who no longer needs to train in anything. This is talking about the mind; when the mind has reached this level of full realization, there is nothing more to practise. Why is this? It is because such a person doesn't have to make use of any of the conventions of teaching and practice. This person has abandoned the defilements.

The *sekha* person has to train in the steps of the path, from the very beginning to the highest level. When they have completed this they are called *asekha*, meaning they no longer need to train because everything is finished. The things to be trained in are finished. Doubts are finished. There are no qualities to be developed. There are no defilements to remove. Such people dwell in peace. Whatever good or evil there is will not affect them; they are unshakeable no matter what they meet. This is talking about the empty mind. Now you will really be confused.

You don't understand this at all. 'If my mind is empty, how can I walk?'

Precisely because the mind is empty. 'If the mind is empty, how can I eat? Will I have desire to eat if my mind is empty?' There's not much benefit in talking about emptiness like this when people haven't trained properly. They won't be able to understand it.

Those who use such terms have sought ways to give us some feeling that can lead us to understand the truth. For example, the Buddha said that in truth these *sankhārā* that we have been accumulating and carrying from the time of our birth until this moment are not ourselves and do not belong to us. Why did he say such a thing? There's no other way to formulate the truth. He spoke in this way for people who have discernment, so that they could gain wisdom. But this is something to contemplate carefully.

Some people will hear the words, 'Nothing is mine', and they will get the idea they should throw away all their possessions. With only superficial understanding, people will get into arguments about what this means and how to apply it. 'This is not my self', doesn't mean you should end your life or throw away your possessions. It means you should give up attachment. There is the level of conventional reality and the level of ultimate reality - supposition and liberation. On the level of convention, there is Mr. A, Mrs. B, Mr. L, Mrs. N, and so on. We use these suppositions for convenience in communicating and functioning in the world. The Buddha did not teach that we shouldn't use these things, but rather that we shouldn't be attached to them. We should realize that they are empty.

It's hard to talk about this. We have to depend on practice and gain understanding through practice. If you want to get knowledge and understanding by studying and asking others you won't really understand the truth. It's something you have to see and know for yourself through practising. Turn inwards to know within yourself. Don't always be turning outwards. But when we talk about practising people become argumentative. Their minds are ready to argue, because they have learned this or that approach to practice and have one-sided attachment to what they have learned. They haven't realized the truth through practice.

Did you notice the Thai people we met the other day? They asked irrelevant questions like, 'Why do you eat out of your almsbowl?' I could see that they were far from Dhamma. They've had modern education so I can't tell them much. But I let the American monk talk to them. They might be willing to listen to him. Thai people these days don't have much interest in Dhamma and don't understand it. Why do I say that? If someone hasn't studied something, they are ignorant of it. They've studied other things, but they are ignorant of Dhamma. I'll admit that I'm ignorant of the things they have learned. The Western monk has studied Dhamma, so he can tell them

something about it.

Among Thai people in the present time there is less and less interest in being ordained, studying and practising. I don't know if it's because they are busy with work, because the country is developing materially, or what the reason might be. In the past when someone was ordained they would stay for at least a few years, four or five Rains. Now it's a week or two. Some are ordained in the morning and disrobe in the evening. That's the direction it's going in now. One fellow told me, 'If everyone were to be ordained the way you prefer, for a few Rains at least, there would be no progress in the world. Families wouldn't grow. Nobody would be building things.'

I said to him, 'Your thinking is the thinking of an earthworm. An earthworm lives in the ground. It eats earth for its food. Eating and eating, it starts to worry that it will run out of dirt to eat. It is surrounded by dirt, the whole earth is covering its head, but it worries it will run out of dirt.'

That's the thinking of an earthworm. People worry that the world won't progress, that it will come to an end. That's an earthworm's view. They aren't earthworms, but they think like them. That's the wrong understanding of the animal realm. They are really ignorant.

There's a story I've often told about a tortoise and a snake. The forest was on fire and they were trying to flee. The tortoise was lumbering along, and then it saw the snake slither by. It felt pity for that snake. Why? The snake had no legs, so the tortoise figured it wouldn't be able to escape the fire. It wanted to help the snake. But as the fire kept spreading the snake fled easily, while the tortoise couldn't make it, even with its four legs, and it died there.

That was the tortoise's ignorance. It thought, if you have legs you can move. If you don't have legs, you can't go anywhere. So it was worried about the snake. It thought the snake would die because it didn't have legs. But the snake wasn't worried; it knew it could easily escape the danger.

This is one way to talk to people who have confused ideas. They feel pity for you if you aren't like them and don't have their views and their knowledge. So who is ignorant? I'm ignorant in my own way; there are things I don't know about, so I'm ignorant on that account.

Meeting different situations can be a cause for tranquillity. But I didn't understand how foolish and mistaken I was. Whenever something disturbed my mind, I tried to get away from it, to escape. What I was doing was escaping from peace. I was continually running away from peace. I didn't want to see this or know about that; I didn't want to think about or experience various things. I didn't realize that this was defilement. I only thought that I needed to remove myself and get far away from people and situations, so that

I wouldn't meet anything disturbing or hear speech that was displeasing. The farther away I could get, the better.

After many years had passed, I was forced by the natural progression of events to change my ways. Having been ordained for some time, I ended up with more and more disciples, more people seeking me out. Living and practising in the forest was something that attracted people to come and pay respects. So as the number of followers increased, I was forced to start facing things. I couldn't run away anymore. My ears had to hear sounds, my eyes to see. And it was then, as an Ajahn, that I started gaining more knowledge. It led to a lot of wisdom and a lot of letting go. There was a lot of everything going on and I learned not to grasp and hold on, but to keep letting go. It made me a lot more skilful than before.

When some suffering came about, it was OK; I didn't add on to it by trying to escape it. Previously, in my meditation, I had only desired tranquillity. I thought that the external environment was only useful insofar as it could be a cause to help me attain tranquillity. I didn't think that having *right view* would be the cause for realizing tranquillity.

I've often said that there are two kinds of tranquillity. The wise have divided it into peace through wisdom and peace through samatha. In peace through samatha, the eye has to be far from sights, the ear far from sounds, the nose far from smells and so on. Then not hearing, not knowing and so forth, one can become tranquil. This kind of peacefulness is good in its way. Is it of value? Yes, it is, but it is not supreme. It is short-lived. It doesn't have a reliable foundation. When the senses meet objects that are displeasing, the mind changes, because it doesn't want those things to be present. So the mind always has to struggle with these objects and no wisdom is born, since the person always feels that he is not at peace because of those external factors.

On the other hand, if you determine not to run away but to look directly at things, you come to realize that lack of tranquillity is not due to external objects or situations, but only happens because of wrong understanding. I often teach my disciples about this. I tell them, when you are intently devoted to finding tranquillity in your meditation, you can seek out the quietest, most remote place, where you won't meet with sights or sounds, where there is nothing going on that will disturb you. There the mind can settle down and become calm because there is nothing to provoke it. Then, when you experience this, examine it to see how much strength it has. When you come out of that place and start experiencing sense contact, notice how you become pleased and displeased, gladdened and dejected, and how the mind becomes disturbed. Then you will understand that this kind of tranquillity is not genuine.

Whatever occurs in your field of experience is merely what it is. When something pleases us, we decide that it is good and when something displeases us, we say it isn't good. That is only our own discriminating minds giving meaning to external objects. When we understand this, then we have a basis for investigating these things and seeing them as they really are. When there is tranquillity in meditation, it's not necessary to do a lot of thinking. This sensitivity has a certain knowing quality that is born of the tranquil mind. This isn't thinking; it is *dhammavicaya*, the factor of investigating Dhamma.

This sort of tranquillity does not get disturbed by experience and sense contact. But then there is the question, 'If it is tranquillity, why is there still something going on?' There is something happening within tranquillity; it's not something happening in the ordinary, afflicted way, where we make more out of it than it really is. When something happens within tranquillity the mind knows it extremely clearly. Wisdom is born there and the mind contemplates ever more clearly. We see the way that things actually happen; when we know the truth of them, then tranquillity becomes all-inclusive. When the eye sees forms or the ear hears sounds, we recognize them for what they are. In this latter form of tranquillity, when the eye sees forms, the mind is peaceful. When the ear hears sounds, the mind is peaceful. The mind does not waver. Whatever we experience, the mind is not shaken.

So where does this sort of tranquillity come from? It comes from that other kind of tranquillity, that unknowing *samatha*. That is a cause that enables it to come about. It is taught that wisdom comes from tranquillity. Knowing comes from unknowing; the mind comes to know from that state of unknowing, from learning to investigate like this. There will be both tranquillity and wisdom. Then, wherever we are, whatever we are doing, we see the truth of things. We know that the arising and ceasing of experience in the mind is just like that. Then there is nothing more to do, nothing to correct or solve. There is no more speculation. There is nowhere to go, no escape. We can only escape through wisdom, through knowing things as they are and transcending them.

In the past, when I first established Wat Pah Pong and people started coming to see me, some disciples said, 'Luang Por is always socializing with people. This isn't a proper place to stay anymore.' But it wasn't that I had gone in search of people; we established a monastery and people were coming to pay respects to our way of life. Well, I couldn't deny what they were saying, but actually I was gaining a lot of wisdom and coming to know a lot of things. But the disciples had no idea. They could only look at me and think my practice was degenerating - so many people were coming, so much disturbance. I didn't have any way to convince them otherwise, but as time

passed, I overcame the various obstacles and I finally came to believe that real tranquillity is born of correct view. If we don't have right view, then it doesn't matter where we stay, we won't be at peace and wisdom won't arise.

People are trying to practise here in the West, I'm not criticizing anyone, but from what I can see, *sīla* (morality) is not very well developed. Well, this is a convention. You can start by practising *samādhi* first. It's like walking along and coming across a long piece of wood. One person can take hold of it at one end. Another person can pick up the other end. But it's the same one piece of wood, and taking hold of either end, you can move it. When there is some calm from *samādhi* practice, then the mind can see things clearly and gain wisdom and see the harm in certain types of behaviour, and the person will have restraint and caution. You can move the log from either end, but the main point is to have firm determination in your practice. If you start with *sīla*, this restraint will bring calm. That is *samādhi* and it becomes a cause for wisdom. When there is wisdom, it helps develop *samādhi* further. And *samādhi* keeps refining *sīla*. They are actually synonymous, developing together. In the end, the final result is that they are one and the same; they are inseparable.

We can't distinguish *samādhi* and classify it separately. We can't classify wisdom as something separate. We can't distinguish *sīla* as something separate. At first we do distinguish among them. There is the level of convention, and the level of liberation. On the level of liberation, we don't attach to good and bad. Using convention, we distinguish good and bad and different aspects of practice. This is necessary to do, but it isn't yet supreme. If we understand the use of convention, we can come to understand liberation. Then we can understand the ways in which different terms are used to bring people to the same thing.

So in those days, I learned to deal with people, with all sorts of situations. Coming into contact with all these things, I had to make my mind firm. Relying on wisdom, I was able to see clearly and abide without being affected by whatever I met with. Whatever others might be saying, I wasn't bothered because I had firm conviction. Those who will be teachers need this firm conviction in what they are doing, without being affected by what people say. It requires some wisdom, and whatever wisdom one has can increase. We take stock of all our old ways as they are revealed to us and keep cleaning them up.

You really have to make your mind firm. Sometimes there is no ease of body or mind. It happens when we live together; it's something natural. Sometimes we have to face illness, for example. I went through a lot of that. How would you deal with it? Well, everyone wants to live comfortably, to have good food

and plenty of rest. But we can't always have that. We can't just indulge our wishes. But we create some benefit in this world through the virtuous efforts we make. We create benefit for ourselves and for others, for this life and the next. This is the result of making the mind peaceful.

Coming here to England and the US is the same. It's a short visit, but I'll try to help as I can and offer teaching and guidance. There are Ajahns and students here, so I'll try to help them out. Even though monks haven't come to live here yet, this is pretty good. This visit can prepare people for having monks here. If they come too soon, it will be difficult. Little by little people can become familiar with the practice and with the ways of the bhikkhusangha. Then the *sāsana* can flourish here. So for now you have to take care of your own mind and make it right.

Even One Word Is Enough

Whatever you will teach, it won't be outside of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*, or, to use another standard classification, morality, meditation and generosity.

People here are already pretty complicated. You have to look at those you are teaching and understand them. Because they are complicated you have to give them something they can relate to. Just to say, 'Let go, let go!' won't be right. Put that aside for the time being. It's like talking to older people in Thailand. If you try to speak bluntly, they will resent it. If I do that, it's OK - if they hear it from me, it pleases them - but otherwise they would get angry.

You can be able to speak well but still not be skilful. Right, Sumedho? It's like that, isn't it?

Ajahn Sumedho: It is. They (some of the other monks) speak the truth, but they don't do it skilfully, and the laypeople don't want to listen. They don't have the skilful means.

Ajahn Chah: Right. They don't have a 'technique'. They don't have the technique in speaking. Like construction - I can build things, but I don't have a technique for construction, to make things beautiful and long-lasting. I can speak, anyone can speak, but it's necessary to have the skilful means to know what is appropriate. Then saying even one word can be of benefit. Otherwise, you can cause trouble with your words.

For example, people here have learned a lot of things. Don't go extolling your way: 'My way is right! Your way is wrong!' Don't do that. And don't merely try to be profound, either. You can lead people to madness by that. Just say, 'Don't discard other ways you may have learned. But for the time being, please put them aside and focus on what we are practising right now.' For example, mindfulness of breathing. That's something you can all teach. Teach to focus on the breath going in and out. Just keep teaching in the same way, and let people get an understanding of this. When you become skilled at teaching one thing, your ability to teach will develop of its own, and you will be able to teach other things. Coming to know one thing well, people can then know many things. It happens of its own. But if you try to teach them many things, they don't get a real understanding of any one thing. If you point out one thing clearly, then they can know many things clearly.

Like those Christians who came today. They just said one thing. They said one thing that was full of meaning. 'One day we will meet again in the place of ultimate truth.' Just this one statement was enough. Those were the words of a wise person. No matter what kind of Dhamma we learn, if we don't realize the ultimate truth, *paramatthadhamma*, in our hearts, we won't reach

satisfaction.

For example, Sumedho might teach me. I have to take that knowledge and try to put it into practice. When Sumedho is teaching me, I understand, but it isn't a real or deep understanding, because I haven't yet practised. When I do actually practise and realize the fruit of practising, then I will get to the point and know the real meaning of it. Then I can say I know Sumedho. I will see Sumedho in that place. That place is Sumedho. Because he teaches that, that is Sumedho.

When I teach about the Buddha, it's like that also. I say the Buddha is that place. The Buddha is not in the teachings. When people hear this they will be startled. 'Didn't the Buddha teach those things?' Yes, he did but, this is talking about ultimate truth. People don't understand it yet.

What I gave those people to think about was, this apple is something that you can see with your eyes. The flavour of the apple isn't something you can know by looking at it. But you do see the apple. I felt that was as much as they were able to listen to. You can't see the flavour, but it's there. When will you know it? When you pick up the apple and eat it.

The Dhamma we teach is like the apple. People hear it, but they don't really know the flavour of the apple. When they practise, then it can be known. The flavour of the apple can't be known by the eyes, and the truth of the Dhamma can't be known by the ears. There is knowledge, true, but it doesn't really reach the actuality. One has to put it into practice. Then wisdom arises and one recognizes the ultimate truth directly. One sees the Buddha there. This is the profound Dhamma. So I compared it to an apple in this way for them; I offered it to that group of Christians to hear and think about.

That kind of talk was a little 'salty'.¹ Salty is good. Sweet is good, sour is good. Many different ways of teaching are good. Well, if you've got something to say, any of you, please feel free to say it. Soon we won't have a chance to discuss things. Sumedho's probably run out of things to say.

Ajahn Sumedho: I'm fed up explaining things to people.

Ajahn Chah: Don't do that. You can't be fed up.

Ajahn Sumedho: Yes, I'll cut that off.

Ajahn Chah: The head teacher can't do that. There are a lot of people trying to reach Nibbāna, so they are depending on you.

Sometimes teaching comes easily. Sometimes you don't know what to say. You are at a loss for words, and nothing comes out. Or is it that you just don't want to talk? It's a good training for you.

Ajahn Sumedho: People around here are pretty good. They aren't violent and mean-spirited or troublesome. The Christian priests don't dislike us. The kinds of questions people ask are about things like God. They want to know what God is, what Nibbāna is. Some people believe that Buddhism teaches nihilism and wants to destroy the world.

Ajahn Chah: It means their understanding is not complete or mature. They are afraid everything will be finished, that the world will come to an end. They conceive of Dhamma as something empty and nihilistic, so they are disheartened. Their way only leads to tears.

Have you seen what it's like when people are afraid of 'emptiness'? Householders try to gather possessions and watch over them, like rats. Does this protect them from the emptiness of existence? They still end up on the funeral pyre, everything lost to them. But while they are alive they are trying to hold on to things, every day afraid they will be lost, trying to avoid emptiness. Do they suffer this way? Of course, they really do suffer. It's not understanding the real insubstantiality and emptiness of things; not understanding this, people are not happy.

Because people don't look at themselves, they don't really know what's going on in life. How do you stop this delusion? People believe, 'This is me. This is mine.' If you tell them about non-self, that nothing is me or mine, they are ready to argue the point until the day they die.

Even the Buddha, after he attained knowledge, felt weary when he considered this. When he was first enlightened, he thought that it would be extremely troublesome to explain the way to others. But then he realized that such an attitude was not correct.

If we don't teach such people, who will we teach? This is my question, which I used to ask myself at those times I got fed up and didn't want to teach anymore: who should we teach, if we don't teach the deluded? There's really nowhere else to go. When we get fed up and want to run away from disciples to live alone, we are deluded.

A bhikkhu: We could be *Pacceka Buddhas*.

Ajahn Chah: That's good. But it's not really correct, being a *Pacceka Buddha*, because you simply want to run away from things.

Ajahn Sumedho: Just living naturally, in a simple environment, then we could naturally be *Pacceka Buddhas*. But these days it's not possible. The environment we live in doesn't allow that to happen. We have to live as monks.

Ajahn Chah: Sometimes you have to live in a situation like you have here

first, with some disturbance. To explain it in a simple way, sometimes you will be an omniscient (*sabbaññū*) Buddha; sometimes you will be a *Pacceka*. It depends on conditions.

Talking about these kinds of beings is talking about the mind. It's not that one is born a *Pacceka*. This is what's called 'explanation by personification of states of mind' (*puggalādhittāna*). Being a *Pacceka*, one abides indifferently and doesn't teach. Not much benefit comes from that. But when someone is able to teach others, then they are manifesting as an omniscient Buddha.

These are only metaphors.

Don't be anything! Don't be anything at all! Being a Buddha is a burden. Being a *Pacceka* is a burden. Just don't desire to be. 'I am the monk Sumedho,' 'I am the monk Ānando.' That way is suffering, believing that you really exist thus. 'Sumedho' is merely a convention. Do you understand?

Believing you really exist, brings suffering. If there is Sumedho, then when someone criticizes you, Sumedho gets angry. Ānando gets angry. That's what happens if you hold these things as real. Ānando and Sumedho get involved and are ready to fight. If there is no Ānando or no Sumedho, then there's no one there - no one to answer the telephone. Ring ring - nobody picks it up. You don't become anything. No one is being anything, and there is no suffering.

If we believe ourselves to be something or someone, then every time the phone rings, we pick it up and get involved. How can we free ourselves of this? We have to look at it clearly and develop wisdom, so that there is no Ānando or no Sumedho to pick up the telephone. If you are Ānando or Sumedho and you answer the telephone, you will get yourself involved in suffering. So don't be Sumedho. Don't be Ānando. Just recognize that these names are on the level of convention.

If someone calls you good, don't be that. Don't think, 'I am good.' If someone says you are bad, don't think, 'I'm bad.' Don't try to be anything. Know what is taking place. But then don't attach to the knowledge either.

People can't do this. They don't understand what it's all about. When they hear about this, they are confused and they don't know what to do. I've given the analogy before about upstairs and downstairs. When you go down from upstairs, you are downstairs, and you see the downstairs. When you go upstairs again, you see the upstairs. The space in between you don't see - the middle. It means Nibbāna is not seen. We see the forms of physical objects, but we don't see the grasping, the grasping at upstairs and downstairs. Becoming and birth; becoming and birth. Continual becoming. The place without becoming is empty. When we try to teach people about the place that

is empty, they just say, 'There's nothing there.' They don't understand. It's difficult - real practice is required for this to be understood.

We have been relying on becoming, on self-grasping, since the day of our birth. When someone talks about non-self, it's too strange; we can't change our perceptions so easily. So it's necessary to make the mind see this through practice, and then we can believe it: 'Oh! It's true!'

When people are thinking, 'This is mine! This is mine!' they feel happy. But when the thing that is 'mine' is lost, they will cry over it. This is the path for suffering to come about. We can observe this. If there is no 'mine' or 'me', we can make use of things while we are living, without attachment to them as being ours. If they are lost or broken, that is simply natural; we don't see them as ours, or as anyone's, and we don't conceive of self or other.

This isn't referring to a mad person; this is someone who is diligent. Such a person really knows what is useful, in so many different ways. But when others look at him and try to figure him out, they will see someone who is crazy.

When Sumedho looks at laypeople, he will see them as ignorant, like little children. When laypeople consider Sumedho, they will think he is someone who's lost it. You don't have any interest in the things they live for. To put it another way, an arahant and an insane person are similar. Think about it. When people look at an arahant, they will think he is crazy. If you curse him, he doesn't care. Whatever you say to him, he doesn't react - like a crazy person. But he is crazy and has awareness. A truly insane person may not get angry when he is cursed, but that's because he doesn't know what's going on. Someone observing the arahant and the mad person might see them as the same. But the lowest is mad, the very highest is an arahant. Highest and lowest are similar, if you look at their external manifestation. But their inner awareness, their sense of things, is very different.

Think about this. When someone says something that ought to make you angry and you just let it go, people might think you're crazy. So when you teach others about these things, they don't understand very easily. It has to be internalized for them to really understand.

For example, in this country, people love beauty. If you just say, 'No, these things aren't really beautiful,' they don't want to listen. If you talk about 'ageing', they're not pleased; 'death', they don't want to hear about it. It means they aren't ready to understand. If they won't believe you, don't fault them for that. It's like you're trying to barter with them, to give them something new to replace what they have, but they don't see any value in the thing you are offering. If what you have is obviously of the highest value, of

course they will accept it. But now why don't they believe you? Your wisdom isn't sufficient. So don't get angry with them: 'What's wrong with you? You're out of your mind!' Don't do that. You have to teach yourself first, establish the truth of the Dhamma in yourself and develop the proper way to present it to others, and then they will accept it.

Sometimes the Ajahn teaches the disciples, but the disciples don't believe what he says. That might make you upset, but instead of getting upset, it's better to search out the reason for their not believing: the thing you are offering has little value to them. If you offer something of more value than what they have, of course they will want it.

When you're about to get angry at your disciples, you should think like this, and then you can stop your anger. It's really not much fun to be angry.

In order to get his disciples to realize the Dhamma, the Buddha taught a single path, but with varying characteristics. He didn't use only one form of teaching or present the Dhamma in the same way for everyone. But he taught for the single purpose of transcending suffering. All the meditations he taught were for this one purpose.

The people of Europe already have a lot in their lives. If you try to lay something big and complicated on them, it might be too much. So what should you do? Any suggestions? If anyone has something to talk about, now is the time. We won't have this chance again. Or if you don't have anything to discuss, if you've exhausted your doubts, I guess you can be *Pacceka* Buddhas.

In the future, some of you will be Dhamma teachers. You will teach others. When you teach others you are also teaching yourselves. Do any of you agree with this? Your own skilfulness and wisdom increase. Your contemplation increases. For example, you teach someone for the first time, and then you start to wonder why it's like that, what the meaning is. So you start thinking like this and then you will want to contemplate to find out what it really means. Teaching others, you are also teaching yourself in this way. If you have mindfulness, if you are practising meditation, it will be like this. Don't think that you are only teaching others. Have the idea that you are also teaching yourself. Then there is no loss.

Ajahn Sumedho: It looks like people in the world are becoming more and more equal. Ideas of class and caste are falling away and changing. Some people who believe in astrology say that in a few years there will be great natural disasters that will cause a lot of suffering for the world. I don't really know if it's true, but they think it's something beyond our capabilities to deal with, because our lives are too far from nature and we depend on machines

for our lives of convenience. They say there will be a lot of changes in nature, such as earthquakes, that nobody can foresee.

Ajahn Chah: They talk to make people suffer.

Ajahn Sumedho: Right. If we don't have mindfulness, we can really suffer over this.

Ajahn Chah: The Buddha taught about the present. He didn't advise us to worry about what might happen in two or three years. In Thailand, people come to me and say, 'Oh, Luang Por, the communists are coming! What will we do?' I ask, 'Where are those communists?' 'Well, they're coming any day now,' they say.

We've had communists from the moment we were born. I don't try to think beyond that. Having the attitude that there are always obstacles and difficulties in life kills off the 'communists'. Then we aren't heedless. Talking about what might happen in four or five years is looking too far away. They say, 'In two or three years Thailand will be communist!' I've always felt that the communists have been around since I was born, and so I've always been contending with them, right up to the present moment. But people don't understand what I'm talking about.

It's the truth! Astrology can talk about what's going to happen in two years. But when we talk about the present, they don't know what to do. Buddhism talks about dealing with things right now and making yourself well-prepared for whatever might happen. Whatever might happen in the world, we don't have to be too concerned. We just practise to develop wisdom in the present and do what we need to do now, not tomorrow. Wouldn't that be better? We can wait for an earthquake that might come in three or four years, but actually, things are quaking now. America is really quaking. People's minds are so wild - that's your quake right there. But folks don't recognize it.

Big earthquakes only occur once in a long while, but this earth of our minds is always quaking, every day, every moment. In my lifetime, I've never experienced a serious earthquake, but this kind of quake is always happening, shaking us and throwing us all around. This is where the Buddha wanted us to look.

But maybe that's not what people want to hear.

Things happen due to causes. They cease due to causes ceasing. We don't need to be worrying about astrological predictions. We can just know what is occurring now. Everyone likes to ask these questions, though. In Thailand, the officials come to me and say, 'The whole country will be communist! What will we do if that happens?'

‘We were born - what do we do about that? I haven’t thought much about this problem. I’ve always thought, since the day I was born the “communists” have been after me.’ After I reply like this, they don’t have anything to say. It stops them.

People may talk about the dangers of communists taking over in a few years, but the Buddha taught us to prepare ourselves right now, to be aware and contemplate the dangers we face that are inherent in this life. This is the big issue. Don’t be heedless! Relying on astrology to tell you what will happen a couple of years from now doesn’t get to the point. Relying on ‘Buddhology’, you don’t have to chew over the past, you don’t worry about the future, but you look at the present. Causes are arising in the present, so observe them in the present.

People who say those things are only teaching others to suffer. But if someone talks the way I do, people will say they are crazy. In the past, there was always movement, but it was only a little bit at a time, so it wasn’t noticeable. For example, Sumedho, when you were first born, were you this size? This is the result of movement and change. Is change good? Of course it is; if there were no movement or change, you never would have grown up. We don’t need to fear natural transformation.

If you contemplate Dhamma, I don’t know what else you would need to think about. If someone predicts what will happen in a few years, we can’t just wait to see what happens before we do anything. We can’t live like that. Whatever we need to do, we have to do it now, without waiting for anything in particular to happen.

These days the populace is in constant motion. The four elements are in motion. Earth, water, fire, and air are moving. But people don’t recognize that the earth is moving. They only look at the external earth and don’t see any movement.

In the future, in this world, if people are married and stay together more than a year or two, others will think there’s something wrong with them. A few months will be the standard. Things are in constant motion like this; it’s the minds of people that are moving. You don’t need to look to astrology. Look to Buddhology and you can understand this.

‘Luang Por, if the communists come, where will you go?’ Where is there to go? We have been born and we face ageing, sickness, and death; where can we go? We have to stay right here and deal with these things. If the communists take over, we will stay in Thailand and deal with that. Won’t they have to eat rice, too?² So why are you so fearful?

If you keep worrying about what might happen in the future, there’s no end to

it. There is only constant confusion and speculation. Sumedho, do you know what will happen in two or three years? Will there be a big earthquake? When people come to ask you about these things, you can tell them they don't need to look so far ahead to things they can't really know for certain; tell them about the moving and quaking that is always going on, about the transformation that allowed you to grow to be as you are now.

The way people think is that having been born, they don't want to die. Is that correct? It's like pouring water into a glass but not wanting it to fill up. If you keep pouring the water, you can't expect it not to be full. But people think like this: they are born but don't want to die. Is that correct thinking? Consider it. If people are born but never die, will that bring happiness? If no one who comes into the world dies, things will be a lot worse. If no one ever dies, we will probably all end up eating excrement! Where would we all stay? It's like pouring water into the glass without ceasing yet still not wanting it to be full. We really ought to think things through. We are born but don't want to die. If we really don't want to die, we should realize the deathless (*amatadhamma*), as the Buddha taught. Do you know what *amatadhamma* means?

It is the deathless - though you die, if you have wisdom it is as if you don't die. Not dying, not being born. That's where things can be finished. Being born and wishing for happiness and enjoyment without dying is not the correct way at all. But that's what people want, so there is no end of suffering for them. The practitioner of Dhamma does not suffer. Well, practitioners such as ordinary monks still suffer, because they haven't yet fulfilled the path of practice. They haven't realized *amatadhamma*, so they still suffer. They are still subject to death.

Amatadhamma is the deathless. Born of the womb, can we avoid death? Apart from realizing that there is no real self, there is no way to avoid death. 'I' don't die; *sankhārā* undergo transformation, following their nature.

This is hard to see. People can't think like this. You need to get free of worldliness, like Sumedho did. You need to leave the big, comfortable home and the world of progress, like the Buddha did. If the Buddha had remained in his royal palace, he wouldn't have become the Buddha. It was by leaving the palace and going to live in forests that he attained that. The life of pleasure and amusement in the palace was not the way to enlightenment.

Who is it that tells you about the astrological predictions?

Ajahn Sumedho: A lot of people talk about it, often just like a hobby or a casual interest.

Ajahn Chah: If it really is as they say, then what should people do? Are they offering any path to follow? From my point of view, the Buddha taught very

clearly. He said that the things we can't be sure about are many, starting from the time we were born. Astrology may talk about months or years in the future, but the Buddha points to the moment of birth. Predicting the future may make people anxious about what could happen, but the truth is that the uncertainty is always with us, right from birth.

People aren't likely to believe such talk, are they?

If you (speaking to a layperson who was present) are afraid, then consider this: suppose that you were convicted of a crime that calls for capital punishment, and in seven days you will be executed. What would go through your mind? This is my question for you. If in seven days you will be executed, what will you do? If you think about it and take it a step further, you will realize that all of us right now are sentenced to die, only we don't know when it will happen. It could be sooner than seven days. Are you aware that you are under this death sentence?

If you were to violate the law of the land and be sentenced to death, you would certainly be most distressed. Meditation on death is recollecting that death is going to take us and that it could be very soon. But you don't think about it, so you feel you are living comfortably. If you do think about it, it will cause you to have devotion to the practice of Dhamma. So the Buddha taught us to practise the recollection of death regularly. Those who don't recollect it live with fear. They don't know themselves. But if you do recollect and are aware of yourself, it will lead you to want to practise Dhamma seriously and be free from such fear.

If you are aware of this death sentence, you will want to find a solution. Generally, people don't like to hear such talk. Doesn't that mean they are far from the true Dhamma? The Buddha urged us to recollect death, but people get upset by such talk. That's the kamma of beings. They do have some knowledge of this fact, but the knowledge isn't yet clear.

¹: Not the same connotation as in English. Here it means 'hard' or 'direct'.

²: Or: the communists will still let us eat rice, won't they?

Making The Heart Good

These days people are going all over the place looking for merit.¹ And they always seem to stop over in Wat Pah Pong. If they don't stop over on the way, they stop over on the return journey. Wat Pah Pong has become a stop-over point. Some people are in such a hurry I don't even get a chance to see or speak to them. Most of them are looking for merit. I don't see many looking for a way out of wrongdoing. They're so intent on getting merit they don't know where they're going to put it. It's like trying to dye a dirty, unwashed cloth.

Monks talk straight like this, but it's hard for most people to put this sort of teaching into practice. It's hard because they don't understand. If they understood it would be much easier. Suppose there was a hole, and there was something at the bottom of it. Now anyone who put their hand into the hole and didn't reach the bottom would say the hole was too deep. Out of a hundred or a thousand people putting their hands down that hole, they'd all say the hole was too deep. Not one would say their arm was too short!

There are so many people looking for merit. Sooner or later they'll have to start looking for a way out of wrongdoing. But not many people are interested in this. The teaching of the Buddha is so brief, but most people just pass it by, just like they pass through Wat Pah Pong. For most people that's what the Dhamma is, a stop-over point.

Only three words, hardly anything to it: *Sabba-pāpassa akaranam*: refraining from all wrongdoing. That's the teaching of all Buddhas. This is the heart of Buddhism. But people keep jumping over it, they don't want this one. The renunciation of all wrongdoing, great and small, from bodily, verbal and mental actions - this is the teaching of the Buddhas.

If we were to dye a piece of cloth we'd have to wash it first. But most people don't do that. Without looking at the cloth, they dip it into the dye straight away. If the cloth is dirty, dying it makes it come out even worse than before. Think about it. Dying a dirty old rag, would that look good?

You see? This is how Buddhism teaches, but most people just pass it by. They just want to perform good works, but they don't want to give up wrongdoing. It's just like saying 'the hole is too deep.' Everybody says the hole is too deep, nobody says their arm is too short. We have to come back to ourselves. With this teaching you have to take a step back and look at yourself.

Sometimes they go looking for merit by the bus load. Maybe they even argue on the bus, or they're drunk. Ask them where they're going and they say they're looking for merit. They want merit but they don't give up vice.

They'll never find merit that way.

This is how people are. You have to look closely, look at yourselves. The Buddha taught about having recollection and self-awareness in all situations. Wrongdoing arises in bodily, verbal and mental actions. The source of all good, evil, wellbeing and harm lies with actions, speech and thoughts. Did you bring your actions, speech and thoughts with you today? Or have you left them at home? This is where you must look, right here. You don't have to look very far away. Look at your actions, speech and thoughts. Look to see if your conduct is faulty or not.

People don't really look at these things. Like the housewife washing the dishes with a scowl on her face. She's so intent on cleaning the dishes, she doesn't realize her own mind's dirty! Have you ever seen this? She only sees the dishes. She's looking too far away, isn't she? Some of you have probably experienced this, I'd say. This is where you have to look. People concentrate on cleaning the dishes but they let their minds go dirty. This is not good, they're forgetting themselves.

Because they don't see themselves people can commit all sorts of bad deeds. They don't look at their own minds. When people are going to do something bad they have to look around first to see if anyone is looking. 'Will my mother see me?' 'Will my husband see me?' 'Will my children see me?' 'Will my wife see me?' If there's no-one watching then they go right ahead and do it. This is insulting themselves. They say no-one is watching, so they quickly finish the job before anyone will see. And what about themselves? Aren't they a 'somebody'?

You see? Because they overlook themselves like this, people never find what is of real value, they don't find the Dhamma. If you look at yourselves you will see yourselves. Whenever you are about to do something bad, if you see yourself in time you can stop. If you want to do something worthwhile, look at your mind. If you know how to look at yourself then you'll know about right and wrong, harm and benefit, vice and virtue. These are the things we should know about.

If I don't talk of these things you won't know about them. You have greed and delusion in the mind but don't know it. You won't know anything if you are always looking outside. This is the trouble with people not looking at themselves. Looking inwards you will see good and evil. Seeing goodness, we can take it to heart and practise accordingly.

Giving up the bad, practising the good; this is the heart of Buddhism. *Sabbapāpassa akaranam* - not committing any wrongdoing, either through body, speech or mind. That's the right practice, the teaching of the Buddhas. Now

‘our cloth’ is clean.

Then we have *kusalassūpasampadā* - making the mind virtuous and skilful. If the mind is virtuous and skilful we don’t have to take a bus all over the countryside looking for merit. Even sitting at home we can attain to merit. But most people just go looking for merit all over the countryside without giving up their vices. When they return home it’s empty-handed they go, back to their old sour faces. There they are washing the dishes with a sour face, so intent on cleaning the dishes. This is where people don’t look, they’re far away from merit.

We may know of these things, but we don’t really know if we don’t know within our own minds. Buddhism doesn’t enter our heart. If our mind is good and virtuous it is happy. There’s a smile in our heart. But most of us can hardly find time to smile, can we? We can only manage to smile when things go our way. Most people’s happiness depends on having things go to their liking. They have to have everybody in the world say only pleasant things. Is that how you find happiness? Is it possible to have everybody in the world say only pleasant things? If that’s how it is when will you ever find happiness?

We must use Dhamma to find happiness. Whatever it may be, whether right or wrong, don’t blindly cling to it. Just notice it then lay it down. When the mind is at ease then you can smile. The minute you become averse to something the mind goes bad. Then nothing is good at all.

Sacittapariyodapanam: Having cleared away impurities the mind is free of worries; it is peaceful, kind and virtuous. When the mind is radiant and has given up evil, there is ease at all times. The serene and peaceful mind is the true epitome of human achievement.

When others say things to our liking, we smile. If they say things that displease us we frown. How can we ever get others to say things only to our liking every single day? Is it possible? Even your own children, have they ever said things that displease you? Have you ever upset your parents? Not only other people, but even our own minds can upset us. Sometimes the things we ourselves think of are not pleasant. What can you do? You might be walking along and suddenly kick a tree stump ... *thud!* ... ‘Ouch!’ ... Where’s the problem? Who kicked who anyway? Who are you going to blame? It’s your own fault. Even our own mind can be displeasing to us. If you think about it, you’ll see that this is true. Sometimes we do things that even we don’t like. All you can say is ‘Damn!’ There’s no-one else to blame.

Gaining merit or boon in Buddhism is giving up that which is wrong. When we abandon wrongness, then we are no longer wrong. When there is no stress there is calm. The calm mind is a clean mind, one which harbours no angry

thoughts, one which is clear.

How can you make the mind clear? Just by knowing it. For example, you might think, 'Today I'm in a really bad mood, everything I look at offends me, even the plates in the cupboard.' You might feel like smashing them up, every single one of them. Whatever you look at looks bad, the chickens - the ducks, the cats and dogs ... you hate them all. Everything your husband says is offensive. Even looking into your own mind you aren't satisfied. What can you do in such a situation? Where does this suffering come from? This is called 'having no merit'. These days in Thailand they have a saying that when someone dies his merit is finished. But that's not the case. There are plenty of people still alive who've finished their merit already; those people who don't know merit. The bad mind just collects more and more badness.

Going on these merit-making tours is like building a beautiful house without preparing the area beforehand. In no long time the house will collapse, won't it? The design was no good. Now you have to try again, try a different way. You have to look into yourself, looking at the faults in your actions, speech and thoughts. Where else are you going to practise, other than at your actions, speech and thoughts? People get lost. They want to go and practise Dhamma where it's really peaceful, in the forest or at Wat Pah Pong. Is Wat Pah Pong peaceful? No, it's not really peaceful. Where it's really peaceful is in your own home.

If you have wisdom wherever you go you will be carefree. The whole world is already just fine as it is. All the trees in the forest are already just fine as they are: there are tall ones, short ones, hollow ones ... all kinds. They are simply the way they are. Through ignorance of their true nature we go and force our opinions onto them. 'Oh, this tree is too short! This tree is hollow!' Those trees are simply trees, they're better off than we are.

That's why I've had these little poems written up in the trees here. Let the trees teach you. Have you learned anything from them yet? You should try to learn at least one thing from them. There are so many trees, all with something to teach you. Dhamma is everywhere, it is in everything in nature. You should understand this point. Don't go blaming the hole for being too deep; turn around and look at your own arm! If you can see this you will be happy.

If you make merit or virtue, preserve it in your mind. That's the best place to keep it. Making merit as you have done today is good, but it's not the best way. Constructing buildings is good, but it's not the best thing. Building your own mind into something good is the best way. This way you will find goodness whether you come here or stay at home. Find this excellence within your mind. Outer structures like this hall here are just like the 'bark' of the

‘tree’, they’re not the ‘heartwood’.

If you have wisdom, wherever you look there will be Dhamma. If you lack wisdom, then even the good things turn bad. Where does this badness come from? Just from our own minds, that’s where. Look how this mind changes. Everything changes. Husband and wife used to get on all right together, they could talk to each other quite happily. But there comes a day when their mood goes bad, everything the spouse says seems offensive. The mind has gone bad, it’s changed again. This is how it is.

So in order to give up evil and cultivate the good you don’t have to go looking anywhere else. If your mind has gone bad, don’t go looking over at this person and that person. Just look at your own mind and find out where these thoughts come from. Why does the mind think such things? Understand that all things are transient. Love is transient, hate is transient. Have you ever loved your children? Of course you have. Have you ever hated them? I’ll answer that for you, too. Sometimes you do, don’t you? Can you throw them away? No, you can’t throw them away. Why not? Children aren’t like bullets, are they?² Bullets are fired outwards, but children are fired right back to the parents. If they’re bad it comes back to the parents. You could say children are your kamma. There are good ones and bad ones. Both good and bad are right there in your children. But even the bad ones are precious. One may be born with polio, crippled and deformed, and be even more precious than the others. Whenever you leave home for a while you have to leave a message, ‘Look after the little one, he’s not so strong.’ You love him even more than the others.

You should, then, set your minds well - half love, half hate. Don’t take only one or the other, always have both sides in mind. Your children are your kamma, they are appropriate to their owners. They are your kamma, so you must take responsibility for them. If they really give you suffering, just remind yourself, ‘It’s my kamma.’ If they please you, just remind yourself, ‘It’s my kamma.’ Sometimes it gets so frustrating at home you must just want to run away. It gets so bad some people even contemplate hanging themselves! It’s kamma. We have to accept the fact. Avoid bad actions, then you will be able to see yourself more clearly.

This is why contemplating things is so important. usually when people practise meditation they use a meditation object, such as *Bud-dho*, *Dham-mo* or *San-gho*. But you can make it even shorter than this. Whenever you feel annoyed, whenever your mind goes bad, just say ‘so!’ When you feel better just say ‘so! It’s not a sure thing.’ If you love someone, just say ‘so!’ When you feel you’re getting angry, just say ‘so!’ Do you understand? You don’t have to go looking into the *tipitaka*. Just ‘so!’ This means ‘it’s transient’.

Love is transient, hate is transient, good is transient, evil is transient. How could they be permanent? Where is there any permanence in them?

You could say that they are permanent insofar as they are invariably impermanent. They are certain in this respect, they never become otherwise. One minute there's love, the next hate. That's how things are. In this sense they are permanent. That's why I say whenever love arises, just tell it 'so!' It saves a lot of time. You don't have to say *aniccam, dukkham, anattā*.¹ If you don't want a long meditation theme, just take this simple word. If love arises, before you get really lost in it, just tell yourself 'so!' This is enough.

Everything is transient, and it's permanent in that it's invariably that way. Just to see this much is to see the heart of the Dhamma, the true Dhamma.

Now if everybody said 'so!' more often, and applied themselves to training like this, clinging would become less and less. People would not be so stuck on love and hate. They would not cling to things. They would put their trust in the truth, not with other things. Just to know this much is enough, what else do you need to know?

Having heard the teaching, you should try to remember it also. What should you remember? Meditate ... Do you understand? If you understand, the Dhamma clicks with you, the mind will stop. If there is anger in the mind, just 'so!' That's enough, it stops straight away. If you don't yet understand look deeply into the matter. If there is understanding, when anger arises in the mind you can just shut it off with 'so! It's impermanent!'

Today you have had a chance to record the Dhamma both inwardly and outwardly. Inwardly, the sound enters through the ears to be recorded in the mind. If you can't do this much it's not so good, your time at Wat Pah Pong will be wasted. Record it outwardly, and record it inwardly. This tape recorder here is not so important. The really important thing is the 'recorder' in the mind. The tape recorder is perishable, but if the Dhamma really reaches the mind it's imperishable, it's there for good. And you don't have to waste money on batteries.

¹: 'Looking for merit' is a commonly-used Thai phrase. It refers to the custom in Thailand of going to monasteries, or 'wats', paying respect to venerated teachers and making offerings.

²: There is a play on words here between the Thai words 'look', meaning children, and 'look bpeun', meaning literally 'gun children' ... that is, bullets.

Why Are We Here?

This Rains Retreat I don't have much strength, I'm not well, so I've come up to this mountain here to get some fresh air. People come to visit but I can't really receive them like I used to because my voice has just about had it, my breath is just about gone. You can count it a blessing that there is still this body sitting here for you all to see now. This is a blessing in itself. Soon you won't see it. The breath will be finished, the voice will be gone. They will fare in accordance with supporting factors, like all compounded things. The Lord Buddha called it *khaya-vayam*, the decline and dissolution of all conditioned phenomena.

How do they decline? Consider a lump of ice. Originally it was simply water; people freeze it and it becomes ice. But it doesn't take long before it's melted. Take a big lump of ice, say as big as this tape recorder here, and leave it out in the sun. You can see how it declines, much the same as the body. It will gradually disintegrate. After not many hours or minutes all that's left is a puddle of water. This is called *khaya-vayam*, the decline and dissolution of all compounded things. It's been this way for a long time now, ever since the beginning of time. When we are born we bring this inherent nature into the world with us, we can't avoid it. At birth we bring old age, sickness and death along with us.

So this is why the Buddha said *khaya-vayam*, the decline and dissolution of all compounded things. All of us sitting here in this hall now, monks, novices, laymen and laywomen, are without exception 'lumps of deterioration'. Right now the lump is hard, just like the lump of ice. It starts out as water, becomes ice for a while and then melts again. Can you see this decline in yourself? Look at this body. It's ageing every day - hair is ageing, nails are ageing - everything is ageing!

You weren't like this before, were you? You were probably much smaller than this. Now you've grown up and matured. From now on you will decline, following the way of nature. The body declines just like the lump of ice. Soon, just like the lump of ice, it's all gone. All bodies are composed of the four elements of earth, water, wind and fire. A body is the confluence of earth, water, wind, and fire, which we proceed to call a person. Originally it's hard to say what you could call it, but now we call it a 'person'. We get infatuated with it, saying it's a male, a female, giving it names, Mr, Mrs, and so on, so that we can identify each other more easily. But actually there isn't anybody there. There's earth, water, wind and fire. When they come together in this known form we call the result a 'person'. Now don't get excited over it. If you really look into it there isn't anyone there.

That which is solid in the body, the flesh, skin, bones and so on, are called the earth element. Those aspects of the body which are liquid are the water element. The faculty of warmth in the body is the fire element, while the winds coursing through the body are the wind element.

At Wat Pah Pong we have a body which is neither male or female: it's the skeleton hanging in the main hall. Looking at it you don't get the feeling that it's a man or a woman. People ask each other whether it's a man or a woman and all they can do is look blankly at each other. It's only a skeleton, all the skin and flesh are gone.

People are ignorant of these things. Some go to Wat Pah Pong, into the main hall, see the skeletons and then come running right out again! They can't bear to look. They're afraid, afraid of the skeletons. I figure these people have never seen themselves before. Because they are afraid of the skeletons, they don't reflect on the great value of a skeleton. To get to the monastery they had to ride in a car or walk; if they didn't have bones how would they be? Would they be able to walk about like that? But they ride their cars to Wat Pah Pong, go into the main hall, see the skeleton and run straight back out again! They've never seen such a thing before. They're born with it and yet they've never seen it. It's very fortunate that they have a chance to see it now. Even older people see the skeleton and get scared. What's all the fuss about? This shows that they're not at all in touch with themselves, they don't really know themselves. Maybe they go home and still can't sleep for three or four days, and yet they're sleeping with a skeleton! They get dressed with it, eat food with it, do everything with it, and yet they're scared of it.

This shows how out of touch people are with themselves. How pitiful! They're always looking outwards, at trees, at other people, at external objects, saying 'this one is big,' 'that's small,' 'that's short,' 'that's long.' They're so busy looking at other things they never see themselves. To be honest, people are really pitiful; they have no refuge.

In the ordination ceremonies the ordinees must learn the five basic meditation themes: *kesā*, head hair; *lomā*, body hair; *nakhā*, nails; *dantā*, teeth; *taco*, skin. Some of the students and educated people snigger to themselves when they hear this part of the ordination ceremony. 'What's the Ajahn trying to teach us here? Teaching us about hair when we've had it for ages. He doesn't have to teach us about this, we know it already. Why bother teaching us something we already know?' Dim people are like this, they think they can see the hair already. I tell them that when I say to 'see the hair' I mean to see it *as it really is*. See body hair as it really is, see nails, teeth and skin as they really are. That's what I call 'seeing' - not seeing in a superficial way, but seeing in accordance with the truth. We wouldn't be so sunk up to the ears in

things if we could see things as they really are. Hair, nails, teeth, skin - what are they really like? Are they pretty? Are they clean? Do they have any real substance? Are they stable? No, there's nothing to them. They're not pretty but we imagine them to be so. They're not substantial but we imagine them to be so.

Hair, nails, teeth, skin - people are really hooked on these things. The Buddha established these things as the basic themes for meditation, he taught us to know these things. They are transient, imperfect and ownerless; they are not 'me' or 'them'. We are born with and deluded by these things, but really they are foul. Suppose we didn't bathe for a week, could we bear to be close to each other? We'd really smell bad. When people sweat a lot, such as when a lot of people are working hard together, the smell is awful. We go back home and rub ourselves down with soap and water and the smell abates somewhat, the fragrance of the soap replaces it. Rubbing soap on the body may make it seem fragrant, but actually the bad smell of the body is still there, it is just temporarily suppressed. When the smell of the soap is gone the smell of the body comes back again.

Now we tend to think these bodies are pretty, delightful, long lasting and strong. We tend to think that we will never age, get sick or die. We are charmed and fooled by the body, and so we are ignorant of the true refuge within ourselves. The true place of refuge is the mind. The mind is our true refuge. This hall here may be pretty big but it can't be a true refuge. Pigeons take shelter here, geckos take shelter here, lizards take shelter here. We may think the hall belongs to us but it doesn't. We live here together with everything else. This is only a temporary shelter, soon we must leave it. People take these shelters for refuge.

So the Buddha said to find your refuge. That means to find your real heart. This heart is very important. People don't usually look at important things, they spend most of their time looking at unimportant things. For example, when they do the house cleaning they may be bent on cleaning up the house, washing the dishes and so on, but they fail to notice their own hearts. Their heart may be rotten, they may be feeling angry, washing the dishes with a sour expression on their face. They fail to see that their own hearts are not very clean. This is what I call 'taking a temporary shelter for a refuge'. They beautify house and home but they don't think of beautifying their own hearts. They don't examine suffering. The heart is the important thing. The Buddha taught to find a refuge within your own heart: *Attā hi attano nātho* - 'Make yourself a refuge unto yourself.' Who else can be your refuge? The true refuge is the heart, nothing else. You may try to depend on other things, but they aren't a sure thing. You can only really depend on other things if you

already have a refuge within yourself. You must have your own refuge first before you can depend on anything else, be it a teacher, family, friends or relatives.

So all of you, both laypeople and homeless ones who have come to visit today, please consider this teaching. Ask yourselves, 'Who am I? Why am I here?' Ask yourselves, 'Why was I born?' Some people don't know. They want to be happy but the suffering never stops. Rich or poor, young or old, they suffer just the same. It's all suffering. And why? Because they have no wisdom. The poor are unhappy because they don't have enough, and the rich are unhappy because they have too much to look after.

In the past, as a young novice, I gave a Dhamma discourse. I talked about the happiness of wealth and possessions, having servants and so on ... a hundred male servants, a hundred female servants, a hundred elephants, a hundred cows, a hundred buffaloes ... a hundred of everything! The laypeople really lapped it up. But can you imagine looking after a hundred buffaloes? Or a hundred cows, a hundred male and female servants? Can you imagine having to look after all of that? Would that be fun? People don't consider this side of things. They have the desire to possess, to have the cows, the buffaloes, the servants, to have hundreds of them. But I say fifty buffaloes would be too much. Just twining the rope for all those brutes would be too much already! But people don't consider this, they only think of the pleasure of acquiring. They don't consider the trouble involved.

If we don't have wisdom, everything round us will be a source of suffering. If we are wise these things - eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind - will lead us out of suffering. Eyes aren't necessarily good things, you know. If you are in a bad mood just seeing other people can make you angry and make you lose sleep. Or you can fall in love with others. Love is suffering too, if you don't get what you want. Love and hate are both suffering, because of desire. Wanting is suffering, wanting not to have is suffering. Wanting to acquire things, even if you get them it's still suffering because you're afraid you'll lose them. There's only suffering. How are you going to live with that? You may have a large, luxurious house, but if your heart isn't good it never really works out as you expected.

Therefore, you should all take a look at yourselves. Why were we born? Do we ever really attain anything in this life? In the countryside here people start planting rice right from childhood. When they reach seventeen or eighteen they rush off and get married, afraid they won't have enough time to make their fortunes. They start working from an early age thinking they'll get rich that way. They plant rice until they're seventy or eighty or even ninety years old. I ask them, 'From the day you were born you've been working. Now it's

almost time to go, what are you going to take with you?' They don't know what to say. All they can say is, 'beats me!' We have a saying in these parts, 'Don't tarry picking berries along the way, before you know it, night falls.' Just because of this 'beats me!' They're neither here nor there, content with just a 'beats me' sitting among the branches of the berry tree, gorging themselves with berries. 'Beats me, beats me.'

When you're still young you think that being single is not so good, you feel a bit lonely. So you find a partner to live with. Put two together and there's friction! Living alone is too quiet, but living with others there's friction.

When children are small the parents think, 'When they get bigger we'll be better off.' They raise their children, three, four, or five of them, thinking that when the children are grown up their burden will be lighter. But when the children grow up they get even heavier. Like two pieces of wood, one big and one small. You throw away the small one and take the bigger one, thinking it will be lighter, but of course it's not. When children are small they don't bother you very much, just a ball of rice and a banana now and then. When they grow up they want a motorcycle or a car! Well, you love your children, you can't refuse. So you try to give them what they want. Sometimes the parents get into arguments over it. 'Don't go and buy him a car, we haven't got enough money!' But when you love your children you've got to borrow the money from somewhere. Maybe the parents even have to go without to get the things their children want. Then there's education. 'When they've finished their studies, we'll be all right.' There's no end to the studying! What are they going to finish? Only in the science of Buddhism is there a point of completion, all the other sciences just go round in circles. In the end it's a real headache. If there's a house with four or five children in it the parents argue every day.

The suffering that is waiting in the future we fail to see, we think it will never happen. When it happens, then we know. That kind of suffering, the suffering inherent in our bodies, is hard to foresee. When I was a child minding the buffaloes I'd take charcoal and rub it on my teeth to make them white. I'd go back home and look in the mirror and see them so nice and white. I was getting fooled by my own bones, that's all. When I reached fifty or sixty my teeth started to get loose. When the teeth start falling out it hurts so much. When you eat it feels as if you've been kicked in the mouth. It really hurts. I've been through this one already. So I just got the dentist to take them all out. Now I've got false teeth. My real teeth were giving me so much trouble I just had them all taken out, sixteen in one go. The dentist was reluctant to take out sixteen teeth at once, but I said to him, 'Just take them out, I'll take the consequences.' So he took them all out at once. Some were still good, too, at

least five of them. He took them all out. But it was really touch and go. After having them out I couldn't eat any food for two or three days.

Before, as a young child minding the buffaloes, I used to think that polishing the teeth was a great thing to do. I loved my teeth, I thought they were good things. But in the end they had to go. The pain almost killed me. I suffered from toothache for months, years. Sometimes both my gums were swollen at once.

Some of you may get a chance to experience this for yourselves someday. If your teeth are still good and you're brushing them everyday to keep them nice and white, watch out! They may start playing tricks with you later on.

I'm just letting you know about these things - the suffering that arises from within, that arises within our own bodies. There's nothing within the body you can depend on. It's not too bad when you're still young, but as you get older things begin to break down. Everything begins to fall apart. Conditions go their natural way. Whether we laugh or cry over them they just go on their way. It makes no difference how we live or die, makes no difference to them. And there's no knowledge or science which can prevent this natural course of things. You may get a dentist to look at your teeth, but even if he can fix them they still eventually go their natural way. Eventually even the dentist has the same trouble. Everything falls apart in the end.

These are things which we should contemplate while we still have some vigour; we should practise while we're young. If you want to make merit then hurry up and do so, don't just leave it up to the oldies. Most people just wait until they get old before they will go to a monastery and try to practise Dhamma. Women and men say the same thing, 'Wait till I get old first.' I don't know why they say that. Does an old person have much vigour? Let them try racing with a young person and see what the difference is. Why do they leave it till they get old? Just like they're never going to die. When they get to fifty or sixty years old or more, 'Hey, Grandma! Let's go to the monastery!' 'You go ahead, my ears aren't so good anymore.' You see what I mean? When her ears were good what was she listening to? 'Beats me!' she was just dallying with the berries. Finally when her ears are gone she goes to the temple. It's hopeless. She listens to the sermon but she hasn't got a clue what they're saying. People wait till they're all used up before they'll think of practising the Dhamma.

Today's talk may be useful for those of you who can understand it. These are things which you should begin to observe, they are our inheritance. They will gradually get heavier and heavier, a burden for each of us to bear. In the past my legs were strong, I could run. Now just walking around they feel heavy. Before, my legs carried me. Now, I have to carry them. When I was a child

I'd see old people getting up from their seat. 'Oh!' Getting up they groan, 'Oh!' There's always this 'Oh!' But they don't know what it is that makes them groan like that. Even when it gets to this extent people don't see the bane of the body. You never know when you're going to be parted from it. What's causing all the pain is simply conditions going about their natural way. People call it arthritis, rheumatism, gout and so on, the doctor prescribes medicines, but it never completely heals. In the end it falls apart, even the doctor! This is conditions faring along their natural course. This is their way, their nature.

Now take a look at this. If you see it in advance you'll be better off, like seeing a poisonous snake on the path ahead of you. If you see it there you can get out of its way and not get bitten. If you don't see it you may keep on walking and step on it. And then it bites.

If suffering arises people don't know what to do. Where to go to treat it? They want to avoid suffering, they want to be free of it but they don't know how to treat it when it arises. And they live on like this until they get old, and sick, and die.

In olden times it was said that if someone was mortally ill one of the next of kin should whisper '*Bud-dho, Bud-dho*' in their ear. What are they going to do with *Buddho*? What good is *Buddho* going to be for them when they're almost on the funeral pyre? Why didn't they learn *Buddho* when they were young and healthy? Now with the breaths coming fitfully you go up and say, 'Mother, *Buddho, Buddho!*' Why waste your time? You'll only confuse her, let her go peacefully.

People don't know how to solve problems within their own hearts, they don't have a refuge. They get angry easily and have a lot of desires. Why is this? Because they have no refuge.

When people are newly married they can get on together all right, but after age fifty or so they can't understand each other. Whatever the wife says the husband finds intolerable. Whatever the husband says the wife won't listen. They turn their backs on each other.

Now I'm just talking because I've never had a family. Why haven't I had a family? Just looking at this word 'household'¹ I knew what it was all about. What is a 'household'? This is a 'hold': if somebody were to get some rope and tie us up while we were sitting here, what would that be like? That's called 'being held'. Whatever that's like, 'being held' is like that. There is a circle of confinement. The man lives within his circle of confinement, and the woman lives within her circle of confinement.

When I read this word 'household', this is a heavy one. This word is no

trifling matter, it's a real killer. The word 'hold' is a symbol of suffering. You can't go anywhere, you've got to stay within your circle of confinement.

Now we come to the word 'house'. This means 'that which hassles'. Have you ever toasted chillies? The whole house chokes and sneezes. This word 'household' spells confusion, it's not worth the trouble. Because of this word I was able to ordain and not disrobe. 'Household' is frightening. You're stuck and can't go anywhere. Problems with the children, with money and all the rest. But where can you go? You're tied down. There are sons and daughters, arguments in profusion until your dying day, and there's nowhere else to go to no matter how much suffering it is. The tears pour out and they keep pouring. The tears will never be finished with this 'household', you know. If there's no household you might be able to finish with the tears but not otherwise.

Consider this matter. If you haven't come across it yet you may later on. Some people have experienced it already to a certain extent. Some are already at the end of their tether. 'Will I stay or will I go?' At Wat Pah Pong there are about seventy or eighty kutīs. When they're almost full I tell the monk in charge to keep a few empty, just in case somebody has an argument with their spouse. Sure enough, in no long time a lady will arrive with her bags. 'I'm fed up with the world, Luang Por.' 'Whoa! Don't say that. Those words are really heavy.' Then the husband comes and says he's fed up too. After two or three days in the monastery their world-weariness disappears.

They say they're fed up but they're just fooling themselves. When they go off to a kutī and sit in the quiet by themselves, after a while the thoughts come: 'When is the wife going to come and ask me to go home?' They don't really know what's going on. What is this 'world-weariness' of theirs? They get upset over something and come running to the monastery. At home everything looked wrong; the husband was wrong, the wife was wrong, but after three days' quiet thinking, 'Hmm, the wife was right after all, it was I who was wrong.' 'Hubby was right, I shouldn't have got so upset.' They change sides. This is how it is, that's why I don't take the world too seriously. I know its ins and outs already, that's why I've chosen to live as a monk.

I would like to present today's talk to all of you for homework. Whether you're in the fields or working in the city, take these words and consider them: 'Why was I born? What can I take with me?' Ask yourselves over and over. If you ask yourself these questions often you'll become wise. If you don't reflect on these things you will remain ignorant. Listening to today's talk, you may get some understanding, if not now, then maybe when you get home. Perhaps this evening. When you're listening to the talk everything is subdued, but maybe things are waiting for you in the car. When you get in the car it may get in with you. When you get home it may all become clear. 'Oh,

that's what Luang Por meant. I couldn't see it before.'

I think that's enough for today. If I talk too long this old body gets tired.

¹: There is a play on words in the Thai language here based on the word for family, *krorp kua*, which literally means 'kitchen-frame' or 'roasting circle'. In the English translation we have opted for a corresponding English word rather than attempt a literal translation of the Thai.

Our Real Home

Now determine in your mind to listen respectfully to the Dhamma. While I am speaking, be as attentive to my words as if it was the Lord Buddha himself sitting before you. Close your eyes and make yourself comfortable, composing your mind and making it one-pointed. Humbly allow the Triple Gem of wisdom, truth and purity to abide in your heart as a way of showing respect to the Fully Enlightened One.

Today I have brought nothing of material substance to offer you, only the Dhamma, the teachings of the Lord Buddha. You should understand that even the Buddha himself, with his great store of accumulated virtue, could not avoid physical death. When he reached old age he ceded his body and let go of the heavy burden. Now you too must learn to be satisfied with the many years you've already depended on the body. You should feel that it's enough.

Like household utensils that you've had for a long time - cups, saucers, plates and so on - when you first had them they were clean and shining, but now after using them for so long, they're starting to wear out. Some are already broken, some have disappeared, and those that are left are wearing out, they have no stable form. And it's their nature to be that way. Your body is the same; it's been continually changing from the day you were born, through childhood and youth, until now it's reached old age. You must accept this. The Buddha said that conditions, whether internal, bodily conditions or external conditions, are not-self, their nature is to change. Contemplate this truth clearly.

This very lump of flesh lying here in decline is reality (*sacca-dhamma*). The facts of this body are reality, they are the timeless teaching of the Lord Buddha. The Buddha taught us to contemplate this and come to terms with its nature. We must be able to be at peace with the body, no matter what state it is in. The Buddha taught that we should ensure that it's only the body that is locked up in jail and the mind is not imprisoned along with it. Now as your body begins to run down and wear out with age, don't resist, but also don't let your mind deteriorate along with it. Keep the mind separate. Give energy to the mind by realizing the truth of the way things are. The Lord Buddha taught that this is the nature of the body, it can't be any other way. Having been born it gets old and sick and then it dies. This is a great truth that you are presently witnessing. Look at the body with wisdom and realize this.

If your house is flooded or burnt to the ground, whatever the threat to it, let it concern only the house. If there's a flood, don't let it flood your mind. If there's a fire, don't let it burn your heart. Let it be merely the house, that which is outside of you that is flooded or burned. Now is the time to allow the

mind to let go of attachments.

You've been alive a long time now. Your eyes have seen any number of forms and colours, your ears have heard so many sounds, you've had any number of experiences. And that's all they were - experiences. You've eaten delicious foods, and all those good tastes were just good tastes, nothing more. The bad tastes were just bad tastes, that's all. If the eye sees a beautiful form that's all it is - a beautiful form. An ugly form is just an ugly form. The ear hears an entrancing, melodious sound and it's nothing more than that. A grating, discordant sound is simply that.

The Buddha said that rich or poor, young or old, human or animal, no being in this world can maintain itself in any single state for long. Everything experiences change and deprivation. This is a fact of life about which we can do nothing to remedy. But the Buddha said that what we can do is to contemplate the body and mind to see their impersonality, that neither of them is 'me' nor 'mine'. They have only a provisional reality. It's like this house, it's only nominally yours. You couldn't take it with you anywhere. The same applies to your wealth, your possessions and your family - they're yours only in name. They don't really belong to you, they belong to nature.

Now this truth doesn't apply to you alone, everyone is in the same boat - even the Lord Buddha and his enlightened disciples. They differed from us only in one respect, and that was their acceptance of the way things are. They saw that it could be no other way.

So the Buddha taught us to probe and examine the body, from the soles of the feet up to the crown of the head, and then back down to the feet again. Just take a look at the body. What sort of things do you see? Is there anything intrinsically clean there? Can you find any abiding essence? This whole body is steadily degenerating. The Buddha taught us to see that it doesn't belong to us. It's natural for the body to be this way, because all conditioned phenomena are subject to change. How else would you have it? In fact there is nothing wrong with the way the body is. It's not the body that causes suffering, it's wrong thinking. When you see things in the wrong way, there's bound to be confusion.

It's like the water of a river. It naturally flows downhill, it never flows uphill. That's its nature. If a person was to go and stand on the river bank and want the water to flow back uphill, he would be foolish. Wherever he went his foolish thinking would allow him no peace of mind. He would suffer because of his wrong view, his thinking against the stream. If he had right view he would see that the water must inevitably flow downhill, and until he realized and accepted that fact he would be bewildered and frustrated.

The river that must flow down the gradient is like your body. Having been young your body's become old and is meandering towards its death. Don't go wishing it were otherwise, it's not something you have the power to remedy. The Buddha told us to see the way things are and then let go of our clinging to them. Take this feeling of letting go as your refuge.

Keep meditating even if you feel tired and exhausted. Let your mind be with the breath. Take a few deep breaths and then establish the attention on the breath, using the mantra word *Bud-dho*. Make this practice continual. The more exhausted you feel the more subtle and focused your concentration must be, so that you can cope with any painful sensations that arise. When you start to feel fatigued then bring all your thinking to a halt, let the mind gather itself together and then turn to knowing the breath. Just keep up the inner recitation, *Bud-dho, Bud-dho*. Let go of all externals. Don't go grasping at thoughts of your children and relatives, don't grasp at anything whatsoever. Let go. Let the mind unite in a single point and let that composed mind dwell with the breath. Let the breath be its sole object of knowledge. Concentrate until the mind becomes increasingly subtle, until feelings are insignificant and there is great inner clarity and wakefulness. Then any painful sensations that arise will gradually cease of their own accord.

Finally you'll look on the breath as if it were some relatives come to visit you. When the relatives leave, you follow them out to see them off. You watch until they've walked up the drive and out of sight, and then you go back indoors. We watch the breath in the same way. If the breath is coarse we know that it's coarse, if it's subtle we know that it's subtle. As it becomes increasingly fine we keep following it, at the same time awakening the mind. Eventually the breath disappears altogether and all that remains is that feeling of alertness. This is called meeting the Buddha. We have that clear, wakeful awareness called *Bud-dho*, the one who knows, the awakened one, the radiant one. This is meeting and dwelling with the Buddha, with knowledge and clarity. It was only the historical Buddha who passed away. The true Buddha, the Buddha that is clear, radiant knowing, can still be experienced and attained today. And if we do attain it, the heart is one.

So let go, put everything down, everything except the knowing. Don't be fooled if visions or sounds arise in your mind during meditation. Lay them all down. Don't take hold of anything at all, just stay with this unified awareness. Don't worry about the past or the future, just be still and you will reach the place where there's no advancing, no retreating and no stopping, where there's nothing to grasp at or cling to. Why? Because there's no self, no 'me' or 'mine'. It's all gone. The Buddha taught to empty yourself of everything in this way, not to carry anything around; he taught us to know, and having

known, let go.

Realizing the Dhamma, the path to freedom from the round of birth and death, is a task that we all have to do alone. So keep trying to let go and understand the teachings. Put effort into your contemplation. Don't worry about your family. At the moment they are as they are, in the future they will be like you. There's no-one in the world who can escape this fate. The Buddha taught to lay down those things that lack a real abiding essence. If you lay everything down you will see the real truth, if you don't, you won't. That's the way it is. And it's the same for everyone in the world. So don't grasp at anything.

Even if you find yourself thinking, well that's all right too, as long as you think wisely. Don't think foolishly. If you think of your children, think of them with wisdom, not with foolishness. Whatever the mind turns to, think of it with wisdom, be aware of its nature. To know something with wisdom is to let it go and have no suffering over it. The mind is bright, joyful and at peace. It turns away from distractions and is undivided. Right now what you can look to for help and support is your breath.

This is your own work, no-one else's. Leave others to do their own work. You have your own duty and responsibility, you don't have to take on those of your family. Don't take on anything else, let it all go. This letting go will make your mind calm. Your sole responsibility right now is to focus your mind and bring it to peace. Leave everything else to the others. Forms, sounds, odours, tastes ... leave them to the others to attend to. Put everything behind you and do your own work, fulfil your own responsibility. Whatever arises in your mind, be it fear of pain, fear of death, anxiety about others or whatever, say to it, 'Don't disturb me. You're no longer any concern of mine.' Just keep this to yourself when you see those 'dhammas' arise.

What does the word dhamma refer to? Everything is a dhamma, there is nothing that is not a dhamma. And what about 'world'? The world is the very mental state that is agitating you at the present moment. 'What are they going to do? When I'm gone who will look after them? How will they manage?' This is all just the 'world'. Even the mere arising of a thought fearing death or pain is the world. Throw the world away! The world is the way it is. If you allow it to dominate your mind it becomes obscured and can't see itself. So whatever appears in the mind, just say, 'This isn't my business. It's impermanent, unsatisfactory and not-self.'

Thinking you'd like to go on living for a long time will make you suffer. But thinking you'd like to die right away or very quickly isn't right either. It's suffering, isn't it? Conditions don't belong to us, they follow their own natural laws. You can't do anything about the way the body is. You can beautify it a little, make it attractive and clean for a while, like the young girls

who paint their lips and let their nails grow long, but when old age arrives, everybody's in the same boat. That's the way the body is, you can't make it any other way. What you can improve and beautify is the mind.

Anyone can build a house of wood and bricks, but the Buddha taught that that sort of home is not our real home, it's only nominally ours. It's home in the world and it follows the ways of the world. Our real home is inner peace. An external, material home may well be pretty but it is not very peaceful. There's this worry and then that, this anxiety and then that. So we say it's not our real home, it's external to us. Sooner or later we'll have to give it up. It's not a place we can live in permanently because it doesn't truly belong to us, it belongs to the world. Our body is the same. We take it to be a self, to be 'me' or 'mine', but in fact it's not really so at all, it's another worldly home. Your body has followed its natural course from birth, and now that it's old and sick, you can't forbid it from being that. That's the way it is. Wanting it to be any different would be as foolish as wanting a duck to be like a chicken. When you see that that's impossible - that a duck must be a duck and a chicken must be a chicken, and that the bodies have to get old and die - you will find courage and energy. However much you want the body to go on lasting, it won't do that.

The Buddha said:

Aniccā vata sankhārā

Impermanent, alas, are all conditions,

Uppāda-vaya-dhammino

Subject to rise and fall.

Uppajjitvā nirujjhanti

Having arisen, they cease.

Tesam vūpasamo sukho.

Their stilling is bliss.

The word *sankhārā* refers to this body and mind. *Sankhārā* are impermanent and unstable. Having come into being they disappear, having arisen they pass away, and yet everyone wants them to be permanent. This is foolishness. Look at the breath. Once it's gone in, it goes out, that's its nature, that's how it has to be. The inhalations and exhalations have to alternate, there must be change. Conditions exist through change, you can't prevent it. Just think, could you exhale without inhaling? Would it feel good? Or could you just inhale? We want things to be permanent but they can't be, it's impossible. Once the breath has come in, it must go out. When it's gone out it comes back

in again, and that's natural, isn't it? Having been born we get old and then die, and that's totally natural and normal. It's because conditions have done their job, because the in-breaths and out-breaths have alternated in this way, that the human race is still here today.

As soon as we are born we are dead. Our birth and our death are just one thing. It's like a tree: when there's a root there must be branches, when there are branches there must be a root. You can't have one without the other. It's a little funny to see how at death, people are so grief-stricken and distracted and at birth, how happy and delighted. It's delusion, nobody has ever looked at this clearly. I think if you really want to cry it would be better to do so when someone's born. Birth is death, death is birth; the branch is the root, the root is the branch. If you must cry, cry at the root, cry at the birth. Look closely: if there was no birth there would be no death. Can you understand this?

Don't worry about things too much, just think 'this is the way things are.' This is your work, your duty. Right now nobody can help you, there's nothing that your family and possessions can do for you. All that can help you now is clear awareness.

So don't waver. Let go. Throw it all away.

Even if you don't let go, everything is starting to leave you anyway. Can you see how all the different parts of your body are trying to slip away? Take your hair; when you were young it was thick and black. Now it's falling out. It's leaving. Your eyes used to be good and strong but now they're weak, your sight is unclear. When your organs have had enough they leave, this isn't their home. When you were a child your teeth were healthy and firm, now they're wobbly, or you've got false ones. Your eyes, ears, nose, tongue - everything is trying to leave because this isn't their home. You can't make a permanent home in conditions, you can only stay for a short time and then you have to go. It's like a tenant watching over his tiny little house with failing eyes. His teeth aren't so good, his eyes aren't so good, his body's not so healthy, everything is leaving.

So you needn't worry about anything because this isn't your real home, it's only a temporary shelter. Having come into this world you should contemplate its nature. Everything there is is preparing to disappear. Look at your body. Is there anything there that's still in its original form? Is your skin as it used to be? Is your hair? They aren't the same, are they? Where has everything gone? This is nature, the way things are. When their time is up, conditions go their way. In this world there is nothing to rely on - it's an endless round of disturbance and trouble, pleasure and pain. There's no peace.

When we have no real home we're like aimless travellers out on the road,

going here and there, stopping for a while and then setting off again. Until we return to our real homes we feel uneasy, just like a villager who's left his village. Only when he gets home can he really relax and be at peace.

Nowhere in the world is there any real peace to be found. The poor have no peace and neither do the rich; adults have no peace and neither do the highly educated. There's no peace anywhere, that's the nature of the world. Those who have few possessions suffer, and so do those who have many. Children, adults, old and young ... everyone suffers. The suffering of being old, the suffering of being young, the suffering of being wealthy and the suffering of being poor - it's all nothing but suffering.

When you have contemplated things in this way you will see *aniccam*, impermanence, and *dukkham*, unsatisfactoriness. Why are things impermanent and unsatisfactory? Because they are *anattā*, not-self.

Both your body that is lying sick and in pain, and the mind that is aware of its sickness and pain, are called dhamma. That which is formless, the thoughts, feelings and perceptions, is called *nāmadhamma*. That which is racked with aches and pains is called *rūpadhamma*. The material is dhamma and the immaterial is dhamma. So we live with dhamma, in dhamma, and we are dhamma. In truth there is no self to be found, there are only dhammas continually arising and passing away as is their nature. Every single moment we're undergoing birth and death. This is the way things are.

When we think of the Lord Buddha, how truly he spoke, we feel how worthy he is of reverence and respect. Whenever we see the truth of something we see his teachings, even if we've never actually practised the Dhamma. But even if we have a knowledge of the teachings, have studied and practised them, as long as we still haven't seen the truth we are still homeless.

So understand this point. All people, all creatures, are preparing to leave. When beings have lived an appropriate time they must go on their way. Rich, poor, young and old must all experience this change.

When you realize that's the way the world is you'll feel that it's a wearisome place. When you see that there's nothing real or substantial you can rely on you'll feel wearied and disenchanted. Being disenchanted doesn't mean you are averse; the mind is clear. It sees that there's nothing to be done to remedy this state of affairs, it's just the way the world is. Knowing in this way you can let go of attachment; you can let go with a mind that is neither happy nor sad, but at peace with conditions through seeing their changing nature with wisdom. *Aniccā vata sankhārā* - all conditions are impermanent.

To put it simply, impermanence is the Buddha. If we truly see an impermanent condition, we'll see that it's permanent. It's permanent in the

sense that its subjection to change is unchanging. This is the permanence that living beings possess. There is continual transformation, from childhood through to old age, and that very impermanence, that propensity to change, is permanent and fixed. If you look at it like this your heart will be at ease. It's not just you who has to go through this, everyone has to.

When you consider things in this way you'll see them as wearisome, and disenchantment will arise. Your delight in the world of sense pleasures will disappear. You'll see that if you have many possessions, you have to leave a lot behind. If you have a few, you leave few behind. Wealth is just wealth, long life is just long life; they're nothing special.

What is important is that we should do as the Lord Buddha taught and build our own home, building it by the method that I've been explaining to you. Build your own home. Let go. Let go until the mind reaches the peace that is free from advancing, free from retreating and free from stopping still. Pleasure is not your home, pain is not your home. Pleasure and pain both decline and pass away.

The great teacher saw that all conditions are impermanent and so he taught us to let go of our attachment to them. When we reach the end of our life we'll have no choice anyway, we won't be able to take anything with us. So wouldn't it be better to put things down before then? They're just a heavy burden to carry around, why not throw off that load now? Why bother to drag these things around? Let go, relax, and let your family look after you.

Those who nurse the sick grow in goodness and virtue. The patient who is giving others that opportunity shouldn't make things difficult for them. If there's pain or some problem or other, let them know and keep the mind in a wholesome state. One who is nursing parents should fill his or her mind with warmth and kindness and not get caught up in aversion. This is the one time you can repay your debt to them. From your birth through your childhood, as you've grown up, you've been dependent on your parents. That you are here today is because your mother and father have helped you in so many ways. You owe them an incredible debt of gratitude.

So today, all of you children and relatives gathered together here, observe how your mother has become your child. Before you were her children, now she has become yours. She has become older and older until she has become a child again. Her memory goes, her eyes don't see well and her ears aren't so good. Sometimes she garbles her words. Don't let it upset you. You who are nursing the sick must know how to let go also. Don't hold onto things, just let her have her own way. When a young child is disobedient sometimes the parents let it have its own way just to keep the peace, just to make it happy. Now your mother is just like that child. Her memories and perceptions are

confused. Sometimes she muddles up your names, or asks you to bring a cup when she wants a plate. It's normal, don't be upset by it.

Let the patient bear in mind the kindness of those who nurse and patiently endure the painful feelings. Exert yourself mentally, don't let the mind become scattered and confused, and don't make things difficult for those looking after you. Let those who are nursing fill their minds with virtue and kindness. Don't be averse to the unattractive side of the job, cleaning up the mucous and phlegm, urine and excrement. Try your best. Everyone in the family give a hand.

She is the only mother you have. She gave you life, she has been your teacher, your doctor and your nurse - she's been everything to you. That she has brought you up, shared her wealth with you and made you her heir is the great goodness of parents. That is why the Buddha taught the virtues of *kataññū* and *katavedī*, knowing our debt of gratitude and trying to repay it. These two dhammas are complimentary. If our parents are in need, unwell or in difficulty, then we do our best to help them. This is *kataññū-katavedī*, the virtue that sustains the world. It prevents families from breaking up, and makes them stable and harmonious.

Today I have brought you the gift of Dhamma in this time of illness. I have no material things to offer you, there seem to be plenty of those in this house already. And so I give you the Dhamma, something which has lasting worth, something which you'll never be able to exhaust. Having received it you can pass it on to as many others as you like and it will never be depleted. That is the nature of Truth. I am happy to have been able to give you this gift of Dhamma and hope it will give you the strength to deal with your pain.

The Four Noble Truths

Today I have been invited by the abbot to give you a teaching, so I ask you all to sit quietly and compose your minds. Due to the language barrier we must make use of a translator, so if you do not pay proper attention you may not understand.

My stay here has been very pleasant. Both the Master and you, his followers, have been very kind, all friendly and smiling, as befits those who are practising the true Dhamma. Your property, too, is very inspiring, but so big! I admire your dedication in renovating it to establish a place for practising the Dhamma.

Having been a teacher for many years now, I've been through my share of difficulties. At present there are altogether about forty branch monasteries¹ of my monastery, Wat Nong Pah Pong, but even these days I have followers who are hard to teach. Some know but don't bother to practise, some don't know and don't try to find out. I don't know what to do with them. Why do human beings have minds like this? Being ignorant is not so good, but even when I tell them, they still don't listen. I don't know what more I can do. People are so full of doubts in their practice, they're always doubting. They all want to go to Nibbāna, but they don't want to walk the path. It's baffling. When I tell them to meditate they're afraid, or if not afraid then just plain sleepy. Mostly they like to do the things I don't teach. When I met the Venerable Abbot here I asked him what his followers were like. He said they're the same. This is the pain of being a teacher.

The teaching I will present to you today is a way to solve problems in the present moment, in this present life. Some people say that they have so much work to do that they have no time to practise the Dhamma. 'What can we do?' they ask. I ask them, 'Don't you breathe while you're working?' 'Yes, of course we breathe!' 'So how come you have time to breathe when you're so busy?' They don't know what to answer. 'If you simply have sati while working you will have plenty of time to practise.'

Practising meditation is just like breathing. While working we breathe, while sleeping we breathe, while sitting down we breathe. Why do we have time to breathe? Because we see the importance of the breath, we can always find time to breathe. In the same way, if we see the importance of meditation practice we will find the time to practise.

Have any of you ever suffered? Have you ever been happy? Right here is the truth, this is where you must practise the Dhamma. Who is it who is happy? The mind is happy. Who suffers? The mind suffers. Wherever these things

arise, that's where they cease. Have you experienced happiness? Have you experienced suffering? This is our problem. If we know *Dukkha*, the cause of suffering, the end of suffering and the way leading to the end of suffering we can solve the problem.

There are two kinds of suffering: ordinary suffering and the extraordinary kind. Ordinary suffering is the suffering which is the inherent nature of conditions: standing is suffering, sitting is suffering, lying down is suffering. This is the suffering that is inherent in all conditioned phenomena. Even the Buddha experienced these things, he experienced comfort and pain, but he recognized them as conditions in nature. He knew how to overcome these ordinary, natural feelings of comfort and pain through understanding their true nature. Because he understood this 'natural suffering' those feelings didn't upset him.

The important kind of suffering is the second kind, the suffering that creeps in from the outside, the 'extraordinary suffering'. If we are sick we may have to get an injection from the doctor. When the needle pierces the skin there is some pain which is only natural. When the needle is withdrawn that pain disappears. This is like the ordinary kind of suffering, it's no problem, everybody experiences it. The extraordinary suffering is the suffering that arises from what we call *upādāna*, grasping onto things. This is like having an injection with a syringe filled with poison. This is no longer an ordinary kind of pain, it is the pain which ends in death. This is similar to the suffering which arises from grasping.

Wrong view, not knowing the impermanent nature of all conditioned things, is another kind of problem. Conditioned things are the realm of *samsāra*. Not wanting things to change - if we think like this we must suffer. When we think that the body is ourselves or belonging to us, we are afraid when we see it change. Consider the breath: once it comes in it must go out, having gone out it must come in again. This is its nature, this is how we manage to live. Things don't function in that way. This is how conditions are but we don't realize it.

Suppose we lost something. If we thought that object was really ours, we would brood over it. If we couldn't see it as a conditioned thing faring according to the laws of nature, we would experience suffering. But if you breathe in, can you live? Conditioned things must naturally change in this way. To see this is to see the Dhamma, to see *aniccam*, change. We live dependent on this change. When we know how things are, then we can let go of them.

The practice of Dhamma is to develop an understanding of the way of things so that suffering doesn't arise. If we think wrongly we are at odds with the

world, at odds with the Dhamma and with the truth. Suppose you were sick and had to go into hospital. Most people think, 'Please don't let me die, I want to get better.' This is wrong thinking, it will lead to suffering. You have to think to yourself, 'If I recover I recover, if I die I die.' This is right thinking, because you can't ultimately control conditions. If you think like this, whether you die or recover, you can't go wrong, you don't have to worry. The mind that wants to get better at all costs, and is afraid of the thought of dying, is the mind which doesn't understand conditions. You should think, 'If I get better that's fine, if I don't get better that's fine.' This way we can't go wrong, we don't have to be afraid or cry, because we have tuned ourselves in to the way things are.

The Buddha saw clearly. His teaching is always relevant, never out-dated. It never changes. In the present day it's still the way it is, it hasn't changed. By taking this teaching to heart we can gain the reward of peace and well-being.

In the teachings there is the reflection of 'not-self': 'this is not my self, this does not belong to me'. But people don't like to listen to this kind of teaching because they are attached to the idea of self. This is the cause of suffering. You should take note of this.

Today a woman asked about how to deal with anger. I told her that the next time she gets angry, she should wind up her alarm clock and put it in front of her. Then she should give herself two hours for the anger to go away. If it was really her anger she could probably tell it to go away like this: 'In two hours be gone!' But anger isn't really ours to command. Sometimes in two hours it's still not gone, at other times in one hour it's gone already. Holding onto anger as a personal possession will cause suffering. If it really belonged to us it would have to obey us. If it doesn't obey us that means it's only a deception. Don't fall for it. Whether the mind is happy or sad, don't fall for it. Whether the mind loves or hates, don't fall for it, it's all a deception.

Have any of you ever been angry? When you are angry does it feel good or bad? If it feels bad then why don't you throw that feeling away? Why bother to keep it? How can you say that you are wise and intelligent when you hold on to such things? Since the day you were born, how many times has the mind tricked you into anger? Some days the mind can even cause a whole family to quarrel, or cause you to cry all night. And yet we still continue to get angry, we still hold onto things and suffer. If you don't see suffering, you will have to keep suffering indefinitely, with no chance for respite. The world of samsāra is like this. If we know the way it is, we can solve the problem.

The Buddha's teaching states that there is no better means to overcome suffering than to see that 'this is not my self,' 'this is not mine.' This is the greatest method. But we don't usually pay attention to this. When suffering

arises we simply cry over it without learning from it. Why is that so? We must take a good hard look at these things, to develop the *Buddho*, the one who knows.

Take note, some of you may not be aware that this is Dhamma teaching. I'm going to give you some Dhamma that's outside the scriptures. Most people read the scriptures but don't see the Dhamma. Today I am going to give you a teaching that's outside the scriptures. Some people may miss the point or not be able to understand it.

Suppose two people are walking together and see a duck and a chicken. One of them says, 'Why isn't that chicken like the duck, why isn't the duck like the chicken?' He wants the chicken to be a duck and the duck to be a chicken. It's impossible. If it's impossible, then even if that person were to wish for the duck to be a chicken and the chicken to be a duck for the rest of his life it would not come to pass, because the chicken is a chicken and the duck is a duck. As long as that person thought like that he would suffer. The other person might see that the chicken is a chicken and the duck is a duck, and that's all there is to it. There is no problem. He sees rightly. If you want the duck to be a chicken and the chicken to be a duck, you are really going to suffer.

In the same way, the law of *aniccam* states that all things are impermanent. If you want things to be permanent you're going to suffer. Whenever impermanence shows itself you're going to be disappointed. One who sees that things are naturally impermanent will be at ease, there will be no conflict. The one who wants things to be permanent is going to have conflict, maybe even losing sleep over it. This is to be ignorant of *aniccam*, impermanence, the teaching of the Buddha.

If you want to know the Dhamma where should you look? You must look within the body and the mind. You won't find it in the shelves of a bookcase. To really see the Dhamma you have to look within your own body and mind. There are only these two things. The mind is not visible to the physical eye, it must be seen with the 'mind's eye'. Before the Dhamma can be realized you must know where to look. The Dhamma that is in the body must be seen in the body. And with what do we look at the body? We look at the body with the mind. You won't find the Dhamma looking anywhere else, because both happiness and suffering arise right here. Have you seen happiness arising in the trees? Or from the rivers, or the weather? Happiness and suffering are feelings which arise in our own bodies and minds.

Therefore the Buddha tells us to know the Dhamma right here. The Dhamma is right here, we must look right here. The Master may tell you to look at the Dhamma in the books, but if you think that this is where the Dhamma *really*

is, you'll never see it. Having looked at the books you must reflect on those teachings inwardly. Then you can understand the Dhamma. Where does the real Dhamma exist? It exists right here in this body and mind of ours. This is the essence of contemplation practice.

When we do this, wisdom will arise in our minds. When there is wisdom in our minds, then no matter where we look there is Dhamma, we will see *aniccam*, *dukkham*, and *anattā* at all times. *Aniccām* means transient. If we cling to the things that are transient we must suffer, *dukkham* because they are not us or ours (*anattā*). But we don't see this, we always see them as being our self and belonging to us.

This means that you don't see the truth of convention. You should understand conventions. For example, all of us sitting here have names. Are our names born with us or are they assigned to us afterwards? Do you understand? This is convention. Is convention useful? Of course it's useful. For example, suppose there are four men, A, B, C, and D. They all must have their individual names for convenience in communicating and working together. If we wanted to speak to Mr. A we could call Mr. A and he would come, not the others. This is the convenience of convention. But when we look deeply into the matter we will see that really there isn't anybody there. We will see transcendence. There is only earth, water, wind and fire, the four elements. This is all there is to this body of ours.

But we don't see it in this way because of the clinging power of *attavādupādāna*.² If we were to look clearly we would see that there isn't really much to what we call a person. The solid part is the earth element, the fluid part is the water element, the part which provides heat is called the fire element. When we break things down we see that there is only earth, water, wind and fire. Where is the person to be found? There isn't one.

That's why the Buddha taught that there is no higher practice than to see that 'this is not my self and does not belong to me.' They are simply conventions. If we understand everything clearly in this way we will be at peace. If we realize in the present moment the truth of impermanence, that things are not our self or belonging to us, then when they disintegrate we are at peace with them, because they don't belong to anybody anyway. They are merely the elements of earth, water, wind and fire.

It's difficult for people to see this, but even so it's not beyond our ability. If we can see this, we will find contentment, we will not have so much anger, greed or delusion. There will always be Dhamma in our hearts. There will be no need for jealousy and spite, because everybody is simply earth, water, wind and fire. There's nothing more to them than this. When we accept this

truth we will see the truth of the Buddha's teaching.

If we could see the truth of the Buddha's teaching we wouldn't have to use up so many teachers! It wouldn't be necessary to listen to teachings every day. When we understand then we simply do what's required of us. But what makes people so difficult to teach is that they don't accept the teaching and argue with the teachers and the teaching. In front of the teacher they behave a little better, but behind his back they become thieves! People are really difficult to teach. The people in Thailand are like this, that's why they have to have so many teachers.

Be careful; if you're not careful you won't see the Dhamma. You must be circumspect, taking the teaching and considering it well. Is this flower pretty? Do you see the ugliness within this flower? For how many days will it be pretty? What will it be like from now on? Why does it change so? In three or four days you have to take it and throw it away, right? It loses all its beauty. People are attached to beauty, attached to goodness. If anything is good they just fall for it completely. The Buddha tells us to look at pretty things as just pretty; we shouldn't become attached to them. If there is a pleasant feeling, we shouldn't fall for it. Goodness is not a sure thing, beauty is not a sure thing. Nothing is certain. There is nothing in this world that is a certainty. This is the truth. The things that aren't true are the things that change, such as beauty. The only truth it has is in its constant changing. If we believe that things are beautiful, when their beauty fades our mind loses its beauty too. When things are no longer good our mind loses its goodness too. When they are destroyed or damaged we suffer because we have clung to them as being our own. The Buddha tells us to see that these things are simply constructs of nature. Beauty appears and in not many days it fades. To see this is to have wisdom.

Therefore we should see impermanence. If we think something is pretty, we should tell ourselves it isn't, if we think something is ugly, we should tell ourselves it isn't. Try to see things in this way, constantly reflect in this way. We will then see the truth within untrue things, and see the certainty within the things that are uncertain.

Today I have been explaining the way to understand suffering, what causes suffering, the cessation of suffering and the way leading to the cessation of suffering. When you know suffering you should throw it out. Knowing the cause of suffering you should throw it out. Practise to see the cessation of suffering. See *aniccam*, *dukkham* and *anattā* and suffering will cease.

When suffering ceases where do we go? What are we practising for? We are practising to relinquish, not in order to gain anything. There was a woman this afternoon who told me that she is suffering. I asked her what she wants to be,

and she said she wants to be enlightened. I said, 'As long as you want to be enlightened you will never become enlightened. Don't want anything.'

When we know the truth of suffering, we throw out suffering. When we know the cause of suffering, then we don't create those causes, but instead practise to bring suffering to its cessation. The practice leading to the cessation of suffering is to see that 'this is not a self,' 'this is not me or them.' Seeing in this way enables suffering to cease. It's like reaching our destination and stopping. That's cessation. That's getting close to Nibbāna. To put it another way, going forward is suffering, retreating is suffering and stopping is suffering. Not going forward, not retreating and not stopping, is anything left? Body and mind cease here. This is the cessation of suffering. Hard to understand, isn't it? If we diligently and consistently study this teaching we will transcend things and reach understanding; there will be cessation. This is the ultimate teaching of the Buddha, it's the finishing point. The Buddha's teaching finishes at the point of total relinquishment.

Today I offer this teaching to you all and to the Venerable Master also. If there is anything wrong in it I ask your forgiveness. But don't be in a hurry to judge whether it is right or wrong, just listen to it first. If I were to give you all a fruit and tell you it's delicious, you should take note of my words, but not believe me offhand, because you haven't tasted it yet. The teaching I give you today is the same. If you want to know whether the 'fruit' is sweet or sour you have to slice a piece off and taste it. Then you will know its sweetness or sourness. Then you could believe me, because then you'd have seen for yourself. So please don't throw this 'fruit' away, keep it and taste it, know its taste for yourself.

The Buddha didn't have a teacher, you know. An ascetic once asked him who his teacher was, and the Buddha answered that he didn't have one.³ The ascetic just walked off shaking his head. The Buddha was being too honest. He was speaking to one who couldn't know or accept the truth. That's why I tell you not to believe me. The Buddha said that to simply believe others is foolish, because there is no clear knowing within. That's why the Buddha said 'I have no teacher.' This is the truth. But you should look at this in the right way. If you misunderstand it you won't respect your teacher. Don't go saying 'I have no teacher.' You must rely on your teacher to tell you what is right and wrong, and then you must practise accordingly.

Today is a fortunate day for all of us. I have had a chance to meet with all of you and the Venerable Master. You wouldn't think that we could meet like this because we live so far apart. I think there must be some special reason that we have been able to meet in this way. The Buddha taught that everything that arises must have a cause. Don't forget this. There must be some cause.

Perhaps in a previous existence we were brothers and sisters in the same family. It's possible. Another teacher didn't come, but I did. Why is that? Perhaps we are creating the causes in the present moment itself. This is also possible.

I leave you all with this teaching. May you be diligent and arduous in the practice. There is nothing better than the practice of Dhamma; Dhamma is the supporter of the whole world. People are confused these days because they do not know the Dhamma. If we have the Dhamma with us we will be content. I am happy to have had this opportunity to help you and the Venerable Teacher in developing the practice of Dhamma. I leave you with my heartfelt good wishes. Tomorrow I will be leaving, I'm not sure where for. This is only natural. When there is coming there must be going, when there is going there must be coming. This is how the world is. We shouldn't be overjoyed or upset by the changes in the world. There is happiness and then there is suffering; there is suffering and then there is happiness; there is gain and then there is loss; there is loss and then there is gain. This is the way things are.

In the Buddha's time there were disciples of the Buddha who didn't like him, because the Buddha exhorted them to be diligent, to be heedful. Those who were lazy were afraid of the Buddha and resented him. When he died, one group of disciples cried and were distressed that they would no longer have the Buddha to guide them. These ones were still not clever. Another group of disciples were pleased and relieved that they would no longer have the Buddha on their backs telling them what to do. A third group of disciples were equanimous. They reflected that what arises passes away as a natural consequence. There were these three groups. Which group do you identify with? Do you want to be one of the pleased ones or what? The group of disciples who cried when the Buddha passed away had not yet realized the Dhamma. The second group were those who resented the Buddha. He was always forbidding them from doing the things they wanted to do. They lived in fear of the Buddha's scorn and reprimands, so when he passed away they were relieved.

These days things aren't much different. It's possible that the teacher here has some followers who are resentful towards him. They might not show it outwardly but it's there in the mind. It's normal for people who still have defilements to feel this way. Even the Buddha had people hating him. I myself have followers who resent me also. I tell them to give up evil actions, but they cherish their evil actions. So they hate me. There are plenty like this. May all of you who are intelligent make yourselves firm in the practice of Dhamma.

¹: At the time of printing this book (2011), there are over three-hundred branch monasteries, large and small, of Wat Nong Pah Pong.

²: One of the Four Bases of Clinging: *Kāmuṣādāna*, clinging to sense objects; *sīlabbatupādāna*: clinging to rites and rituals; *ditthupādāna*: clinging to views, and *attavādupādāna*, clinging to the idea of self.

³: Soon after his enlightenment, the Buddha was walking on his way to Benares and was approached by a wandering ascetic, who said, ‘Your features are clear, friend, your bearing serene. Who is your teacher?’ The Buddha answered that there was no-one in this world who could claim to be his teacher, because he was completely self-enlightened. The ascetic could not understand his answer, and walked off, muttering, ‘Well, good for you, friend, good for you.’

Living In The World

Most people still don't know the essence of meditation practice. They think that walking meditation, sitting meditation and listening to Dhamma talks are the practice. These are only the outer forms of practice. The real practice takes place when the mind encounters a sense object. That's the place to practise, where sense contact occurs. When people say things we don't like, there is resentment, if they say things we like, we experience pleasure. Now this is the place to practise. How are we going to practise with these things? This is the crucial point. If we just run around chasing after happiness and running away from suffering all the time, we can practise until the day we die and never see the Dhamma. This is useless. When pleasure and pain arise how are we going to use the Dhamma to be free of them? This is the point of practice.

Usually when people encounter something disagreeable they don't open up to it. For instance when people are criticized: 'Don't bother me! Why blame me?' This is someone who's closed himself off. Right there is the place to practise. When people criticize us we should listen. Are they speaking the truth? We should be open and consider what they are saying. Maybe there is something in what they say, perhaps there is something blameworthy within us. They may be right and yet we immediately take offence. If people point out our faults we should strive to be rid of these faults and improve ourselves. This is how intelligent people practise.

The place where there is confusion is the place where peace can arise. When confusion is penetrated with understanding, what remains is peace. Some people can't accept criticism, they're arrogant. Instead they turn around and argue. This is especially so when adults deal with children. Actually children may say some intelligent things sometimes but if you happen to be their mother, for instance, you can't give in to them. If you are a teacher your students may sometimes tell you something you didn't know, but because you are the teacher you can't listen. This is not right thinking.

In the Buddha's time there was one disciple who was very astute. At one time, as the Buddha was expounding the Dhamma, he turned to this monk and asked, 'Sāriputta, do you believe this?' Venerable Sāriputta replied, 'No, I don't yet believe it.' The Buddha praised his answer; 'That's very good, Sāriputta, you are one who is endowed with wisdom. One who is wise doesn't readily believe, he listens with an open mind and then weighs up the truth of that matter before believing or disbelieving.'

Now the Buddha here has set a fine example for a teacher. What Venerable Sāriputta said was true, he simply expressed his true feelings. Some people

would think that to say you didn't believe that teaching would be like questioning the teacher's authority, they'd be afraid to say such a thing. They'd just go ahead and agree. This is how the worldly way goes. But the Buddha didn't take offence. He said that you needn't be ashamed of those things which aren't wrong or bad. It's not wrong to say that you don't believe if you don't believe. That's why Venerable Sāriputta said, 'I don't yet believe it.' The Buddha praised him; 'This monk has much wisdom. He carefully considers before believing anything.' The Buddha's actions here are a good example for one who is a teacher of others. Sometimes you can learn things even from small children; don't cling blindly to positions of authority.

Whether you are standing, sitting, or walking around in various places, you can always study the things around you. We study in the natural way, receptive to all things, be they sights, sounds, smells, tastes, feelings or thoughts. The wise person considers them all. In the real practice, we come to the point where there are no longer any concerns weighing on the mind.

If we still don't know like and dislike as they arise, there is still some concern in our minds. If we know the truth of these things, we reflect, 'Oh, there is nothing to this feeling of liking here. It's just a feeling that arises and passes away. Dislike is nothing more, just a feeling that arises and passes away. Why make anything out of them?' If we think that pleasure and pain are personal possessions, then we're in for trouble, we never get beyond the point of having some concern or other in an endless chain. This is how things are for most people.

But these days teachers don't often talk about the mind when teaching the Dhamma, they don't talk about the truth. If you talk about the truth people may take exception. They say things like, 'He doesn't know time and place, he doesn't know how to speak nicely.' But people should listen to the truth. A true teacher doesn't just talk from memory, he speaks the truth. People in society usually speak from memory, the teacher speaks the truth. People in the society usually speak from memory, and what's more they usually speak in such a way as to exalt themselves. The true monk doesn't speak like that, he speaks the truth, the way things are.

No matter how much the teacher explains the truth, it's difficult for people to understand. It's hard to understand the Dhamma. If you understand the Dhamma you should practise accordingly. It may not be necessary to become a monk, although the monk's life is the ideal form for practice. To really practise, you have to forsake the confusion of the world, give up family and possessions, and take to the forests. These are the ideal places to practise.

But if we still have family and responsibilities how are we to practise? Some people say it's impossible to practise Dhamma as a layperson. Consider,

which group is larger, monks or laypeople? There are far more laypeople. Now if only the monks practise and the laypeople don't, then that means there's going to be a lot of confusion. This is wrong understanding. 'I can't become a monk.' Becoming a monk isn't the point! Being a monk doesn't mean anything, if you don't practise. If you really understand the practice of Dhamma then no matter what position or profession you hold in life, be it a teacher, doctor, civil servant or whatever, you can practise the Dhamma every minute of the day.

To think you can't practise as a layman is to lose track of the path completely. Why is it people can find the incentive to do other things? If they feel they are lacking something they make an effort to obtain it. If there is sufficient desire, people can do anything. Some say, 'I haven't got time to practise the Dhamma.' I say, 'Then how come you've got time to breathe?' Breathing is vital to people's lives. If they saw Dhamma practice as vital to their lives, they would see it as important as their breathing.

The practice of Dhamma isn't something you have to go running around for or exhaust yourself over. Just look at the feelings which arise in your mind. When the eye sees form, ear hears sounds, nose smells odours and so on, they all come to this one mind, 'the one who knows.' Now when the mind perceives these things what happens? If we like that object we experience pleasure, if we dislike it we experience displeasure. That's all there is to it.

So where are you going to find happiness in this world? Do you expect everybody to say only pleasant things to you all your life? Is that possible? No, it's not. If it's not possible, then where are you going to go? The world is simply like this, we must know the world - *lokavidū* - know the truth of this world. The world is something we should clearly understand. The Buddha lived in this world, he didn't live anywhere else. He experienced family life, but he saw its limitations and detached himself from them. Now, how are you as laypeople going to practise? If you want to practise, you must make an effort to follow the path. If you persevere with the practice, you too will see the limitations of this world and be able to let go.

People who drink alcohol sometimes say, 'I just can't give it up.' Why can't they give it up? Because they don't yet see the liability in it. If they clearly saw the liability in it, they wouldn't have to wait to be told to give it up. If you don't see the liability of something, that means you also can't see the benefit of giving it up. Your practice becomes fruitless, you are just playing at practice. If you clearly see the liability and the benefit of something you won't have to wait for others to tell you about it.

Consider the story of the fisherman who finds something in his fish-trap. He knows something is in there, he can hear it flapping about inside. Thinking

it's a fish, he reaches his hand into the trap, only to find a different kind of animal. He can't yet see it, so he's in two minds about it. It could be an eel¹, but then again it could be a snake. If he throws it away he may regret it, it could be an eel. On the other hand, if he keeps holding on to it and it turns out to be a snake it may bite him. He's caught in a state of doubt. His desire is so strong he holds on, just in case it's an eel, but the minute he brings it out and sees the striped skin he throws it down straight away. He doesn't have to wait for someone to call out, 'It's a snake, it's a snake, let go!' The sight of the snake tells him what to do much more clearly than words could do. Why? Because he sees the danger - snakes can bite! Nobody has to tell him about it. In the same way, if we practise till we see things as they are, we won't meddle with things that are harmful.

People don't usually practise in this way, they usually do other things. They don't contemplate things, they don't reflect on old age, sickness and death. They only talk about non-ageing and non-death, so they never develop the right feeling for Dhamma practice. They go and listen to Dhamma talks but they don't really listen. Sometimes I get invited to give talks at important functions, but it's a nuisance for me to go. Why so? Because when I look at the people gathered there I can see that they haven't come to listen to the Dhamma. Some are smelling of alcohol, some are smoking cigarettes, some are chatting; they don't look at all like people who have come out of faith in the Dhamma. Giving talks at such places is of little fruit. People who are sunk in heedlessness tend to think things like, 'When is he ever going to stop talking? Can't do this, can't do that ...' Their minds just wander all over the place.

Sometimes they even invite me to give a talk just for the sake of formality: 'Please give us just a small Dhamma talk, Venerable Sir.' They don't want me to talk too much, it might annoy them! As soon as I hear people say this I know what they're about. These people don't like listening to Dhamma. It annoys them. If I just give a small talk they won't understand. If you take only a little food, is it enough? Of course not.

Sometimes I'm giving a talk, just warming up to the subject, and some drunkard will call out, 'Okay, make way, make way for the Venerable Sir, he's coming out now!' -trying to drive me away! If I meet this kind of person I get a lot of food for reflection, I get an insight into human nature. It's like a person having a bottle full of water and then asking for more. There's nowhere to put it. It isn't worth the time and energy to teach them, because their minds are already full. Pour anymore in and it just overflows uselessly. If their bottle was empty, there would be somewhere to put the water, and both the giver and the receiver would benefit.

In this way, when people are really interested in Dhamma and sit quietly, listening carefully, I feel more inspired to teach. If people don't pay attention it's just like the man with the bottle full of water, there's no room to put anymore. It's hardly worth my while talking to them. In situations like this I just don't find any energy arising to teach. You can't put much energy into giving, when no-one's putting much energy into receiving.

These days giving talks tends to be like this, and it's getting worse all the time. People don't search for truth, they study simply to find the necessary knowledge to make a living, raise families and look after themselves. They study for a livelihood. There may be some study of Dhamma, but not much. Students nowadays have much more knowledge than students of previous times. They have all the requisites at their disposal, everything is more convenient. But they also have a lot more confusion and suffering than before. Why is this? Because they only look for the kind of knowledge used to make a living.

Even the monks are like this. Sometimes I hear them say, 'I didn't become a monk to practise the Dhamma, I only ordained to study.' These are the words of someone who has completely cut off the path of practice. There's no way ahead, it's a dead end. When these monks teach it's only from memory. They may teach one thing but their minds are in a completely different place. There's no truth in such teachings.

This is how the world is. If you try to live simply, practising the Dhamma and living peacefully, they say you are weird and anti-social. They say you're obstructing progress in society. They even intimidate you. Eventually you might even start to believe them and revert to the worldly ways, sinking deeper and deeper into the world until it's impossible to get out. Some people say, 'I can't get out now, I've gone in too deeply.' This is how society tends to be. It doesn't appreciate the value of Dhamma.

The value of Dhamma isn't to be found in books. Those are just the external appearances of Dhamma, they're not the realization of Dhamma as a personal experience. If you realize the Dhamma, you realize your own mind, you see the truth there. When the truth becomes apparent, it cuts off the stream of delusion.

The teaching of the Buddha is the unchanging truth, whether in the present or in any other time. The Buddha revealed this truth 2,500 years ago and it's been the truth ever since. Nothing should be added to or taken away from it. The Buddha said, 'What the *Tathāgata* has laid down should not be discarded, what has not been laid down by the *Tathāgata* should not be added to the teachings.' He 'sealed off' the teachings. Why did the Buddha seal them off? Because these teachings are the words of one who has no defilements. No

matter how the world may change, these teachings are unaffected, they don't change with it. If something is wrong, even if people say it's right doesn't make it any the less wrong. If something is right, that doesn't change just because people say it's not. Generation after generation may come and go but these things don't change, because these teachings are the truth.

Now, who created this truth? The truth itself created the truth! Did the Buddha create it? No, he didn't. The Buddha only *discovered* the truth, the way things are, and then he set out to declare it. The truth is constantly true, whether a Buddha arises in the world or not. The Buddha only 'owns' the Dhamma in this sense, he didn't actually create it. It's been here all the time. No-one had previously searched for and found the Deathless then taught it as the Dhamma. But the Buddha didn't invent it, it was already there.

At some point in time, the truth is illuminated and the practice of Dhamma flourishes. As time goes on and generations pass away, the practice degenerates until the teaching fades away completely. After a time the teaching is re-founded and flourishes once more. As time goes on the adherents of the Dhamma multiply, prosperity sets in, and once more the teaching begins to follow the darkness of the world. And so once more it degenerates until such a time as it can no longer hold ground. Confusion reigns once more. Then it is time to re-establish the truth. In fact the truth doesn't go anywhere. When Buddhas pass away, the Dhamma doesn't disappear with them.

The world revolves like this. It's something like a mango tree. The tree matures, blossoms, and fruits appear and grow to ripeness. They become rotten and the seed goes back into the ground to become a new mango tree. The cycle starts once more. Eventually there are more ripe fruits which proceed to fall, rot, sink into the ground as seeds and grow once more into trees. This is how the world is. It doesn't go very far, it just revolves around the same old things.

Our lives these days are the same. Today we are simply doing the same old things we've always done. People think too much. There are so many things to get interested in, but none of them leads to completion. There are the sciences like mathematics, physics, psychology and so on. You can delve into any of these but you can only finalize things with the truth.

Suppose there was a cart being pulled by an ox. As long as the ox pulls the cart the tracks will follow. The wheels are round yet the tracks are long; the tracks are long yet the wheels are merely circles. Just looking at a stationary cart you can't see anything long about it, but once the ox starts moving you see the tracks stretching out behind you. As long as the ox pulls, the wheels keep on turning, but there comes a day when the ox tires and throws off its

harness. The ox walks off and leaves the empty cart sitting there. The wheels no longer turn. In time the cart falls apart, its components go back into the four elements - earth, water, wind and fire.

Searching for peace within the world, the cart wheel tracks stretch out endlessly behind you. As long as you follow the world there is no stopping, no rest. If you simply stop following it, the cart comes to rest, the wheels no longer turn. Following the world turns the wheels ceaselessly. Creating bad kamma is like this. As long as you follow the old ways, there is no stopping. If you stop, there is stopping. This is how we practise the Dhamma.

¹: Considered a delicacy in some parts of Thailand.

Tuccho Pothila

There are two ways to support Buddhism. One is known as *āmisapūjā*, supporting through material offerings: the four requisites of food, clothing, shelter and medicine. These material offerings are given to the Sangha of monks and nuns, enabling them to live in reasonable comfort for the practice of Dhamma. This fosters the direct realization of the Buddha's teaching, in turn bringing continued prosperity to the Buddhist religion.

Buddhism can be likened to a tree. A tree has roots, a trunk, branches, twigs and leaves. All the leaves and branches, including the trunk, depend on the roots to absorb nutriment from the soil. Just as the tree depends on the roots to sustain it, our actions and our speech are like 'branches' and 'leaves', which depend on the mind, the 'root', absorbing nutriment, which it then sends out to the 'trunk', 'branches' and 'leaves'. These in turn bear fruit as our speech and actions. Whatever state the mind is in, skilful or unskilful, it expresses that quality outwardly through our actions and speech.

Therefore, the support of Buddhism through the practical application of the teaching is the most important kind of support. For example, in the ceremony of determining the precepts on observance days, the teacher describes those unskilful actions which should be avoided. But if you simply go through this ceremony without reflecting on their meaning, progress is difficult and you will be unable to find the true practice. The real support of Buddhism must therefore be done through *patipattipūjā*, the 'offering' of practice, cultivating true restraint, concentration and wisdom. Then you will know what Buddhism is all about. If you don't understand through practice, you still won't know, even if you learn the whole Tipitaka.

In the time of the Buddha there was a monk known as Tuccho Pothila. Tuccho Pothila was very learned, thoroughly versed in the scriptures and texts. He was so famous that he was revered by people everywhere and had eighteen monasteries under his care. When people heard the name 'Tuccho Pothila' they were awe-struck and nobody would dare question anything he taught, so much did they revere his command of the teachings. Tuccho Pothila was one of the Buddha's most learned disciples.

One day he went to pay respects to the Buddha. As he was paying his respects, the Buddha said, 'Ah, hello, Venerable Empty Scripture!' Just like that! They conversed for a while until it was time to go, and then, as he was taking leave of the Buddha, the Buddha said, 'Oh, leaving now, Venerable Empty Scripture?'

That was all the Buddha said. On arriving, 'Oh, hello, Venerable Empty

Scripture.’ When it was time to go, ‘Ah, leaving now, Venerable Empty Scripture?’ The Buddha didn’t expand on it, that was all the teaching he gave. Tuccho Pothila, the eminent teacher, was puzzled, ‘Why did the Buddha say that? What did he mean?’ He thought and thought, turning over everything he had learned, until eventually he realized, ‘It’s true! Venerable Empty Scripture - a monk who studies but doesn’t practise.’ When he looked into his heart he saw that really he was no different from laypeople. Whatever they aspired to he also aspired to, whatever they enjoyed he also enjoyed. There was no real ‘*samana*’ within him, no truly profound quality capable of firmly establishing him in the Noble Way and providing true peace.

So he decided to practise. But there was nowhere for him to go to. All the teachers around were his own students, no-one would dare accept him. Usually when people meet their teacher they become timid and deferential, and so no-one would dare become his teacher.

Finally he went to see a certain young novice, who was enlightened, and asked to practise under him. The novice said, ‘Yes, sure you can practise with me, but only if you’re sincere. If you’re not sincere then I won’t accept you.’ Tuccho Pothila pledged himself as a student of the novice.

The novice then told him to put on all his robes. Now there happened to be a muddy bog nearby. When Tuccho Pothila had neatly put on all his robes, expensive ones they were, too, the novice said, ‘Okay, now run down into this muddy bog. If I don’t tell you to stop, don’t stop. If I don’t tell you to come out, don’t come out. Okay, run!’

Tuccho Pothila, neatly robed, plunged into the bog. The novice didn’t tell him to stop until he was completely covered in mud. Finally he said, ‘You can stop, now’ so he stopped. ‘Okay, come out now!’ and so he came out.

This clearly showed the novice that Tuccho Pothila had given up his pride. He was ready to accept the teaching. If he wasn’t ready to learn he wouldn’t have run into the bog like that, being such a famous teacher, but he did it. The young novice, seeing this, knew that Tuccho Pothila was sincerely determined to practise.

When Tuccho Pothila had come out of the bog, the novice gave him the teaching. He taught him to observe the sense objects, to know the mind and to know the sense objects, using the simile of a man catching a lizard hiding in a termite mound. If the mound had six holes in it, how would he catch it? He would have to seal off five of the holes and leave just one open. Then he would have to simply watch and wait, guarding that one hole. When the lizard ran out he could catch it.

Observing the mind is like this. Closing off the eyes, ears, nose, tongue and

body, we leave only the mind. To 'close off' the senses means to restrain and compose them, observing only the mind. Meditation is like catching the lizard. We use sati to note the breath. Sati is the quality of recollection, as in asking yourself, 'What am I doing?' *Sampajañña* is the awareness that 'now I am doing such and such'. We observe the in and out breathing with sati and *sampajañña*.

This quality of recollection is something that arises from practice, it's not something that can be learned from books. Know the feelings that arise. The mind may be fairly inactive for a while and then a feeling arises. Sati works in conjunction with these feelings, recollecting them. There is sati, the recollection that 'I will speak', 'I will go', 'I will sit' and so on, and then there is *sampajañña*, the awareness that 'now I am walking', 'I am lying down', 'I am experiencing such and such a mood.' With sati and *sampajañña*, we can know our minds in the present moment and we will know how the mind reacts to sense impressions.

That which is aware of sense objects is called 'mind'. Sense objects 'wander into' the mind. For instance, there is a sound, like the electric drill here. It enters through the ear and travels inwards to the mind, which acknowledges that it is the sound of an electric drill. That which acknowledges the sound is called 'mind'.

Now this mind which acknowledges that sound is quite basic. It's just the average mind. Perhaps annoyance arises within the one who acknowledges. We must further train 'the one who acknowledges' to become 'the one who knows' in accordance with the truth - known as *Buddho*. If we don't clearly know in accordance with the truth then we get annoyed at sounds of people, cars, electric drills and so on. This is just the ordinary, untrained mind acknowledging the sound with annoyance. It knows in accordance with its preferences, not in accordance with the truth. We must further train it to know with vision and insight, *ñānadassana*,¹ the power of the refined mind, so that it knows the sound as simply sound. If we don't cling to sound there is no annoyance. The sound arises and we simply note it. This is called truly knowing the arising of sense objects. If we develop the *Buddho*, clearly realizing the sound as sound, then it doesn't annoy us. It arises according to conditions, it is not a being, an individual, a self, an 'us' or 'them'. It's just sound. The mind lets go.

This knowing is called *Buddho*, the knowledge that is clear and penetrating. With this knowledge we can let the sound simply be sound. It doesn't disturb us unless we disturb it by thinking, 'I don't want to hear that sound, it's annoying.' Suffering arises because of this thinking. Right here is the cause of suffering, that we don't know the truth of this matter, we haven't developed

the *Buddho*. We are not yet clear, not yet awake, not yet aware. This is the raw, untrained mind. This mind is not yet truly useful to us.

Therefore the Buddha taught that this mind must be trained and developed. We must develop the mind just like we develop the body, but we do it in a different way. To develop the body we must exercise it, jogging in the morning and evening and so on. This is exercising the body. As a result the body becomes more agile, stronger, the respiratory and nervous systems become more efficient. To exercise the mind we don't have to move it around, but bring it to a halt, bring it to rest.

For instance, when practising meditation, we take an object, such as the in-and out-breathing, as our foundation. This becomes the focus of our attention and reflection. We look at the breathing. To look at the breathing means to follow the breathing with awareness, noting its rhythm, its coming and going. We put awareness into the breath, following the natural in and out breathing and letting go of all else. As a result of staying on one object of awareness, our mind becomes refreshed. If we let the mind think of this, that and the other, there are many objects of awareness; the mind doesn't unify, it doesn't come to rest.

To say the mind stops means that it feels as if it's stopped, it doesn't go running here and there. It's like having a sharp knife. If we use the knife to cut at things indiscriminately, such as stones, bricks and grass, our knife will quickly become blunt. We should use it for cutting only the things it was meant for. Our mind is the same. If we let the mind wander after thoughts and feelings which have no value or use, the mind becomes tired and weak. If the mind has no energy, wisdom will not arise, because the mind without energy is the mind without *samādhi*.

If the mind hasn't stopped you can't clearly see the sense objects for what they are. The knowledge that the mind is the mind, sense objects are merely sense objects, is the root from which Buddhism has grown and developed. This is the heart of Buddhism.

We must cultivate this mind, develop it, training it in calm and insight. We train the mind to have restraint and wisdom by letting the mind stop and allowing wisdom to arise, by knowing the mind as it is.

You know, the way we human beings are, the way we do things, we are just like little children. A child doesn't know anything. To an adult observing the behaviour of a child, the way it plays and jumps around, its actions don't seem to have much purpose. If our mind is untrained it is like a child. We speak without awareness and act without wisdom. We may fall to ruin or cause untold harm and not even know it. A child is ignorant, it plays as

children do. Our ignorant mind is the same.

So we should train this mind. The Buddha taught us to train the mind, to teach the mind. Even if we support Buddhism with the four requisites, our support is still superficial, it reaches only the 'bark' or 'sapwood' of the tree. The real support of Buddhism must be done through the practice, nowhere else, training our actions, speech and thoughts according to the teachings. This is much more fruitful. If we are straight and honest, possessed of restraint and wisdom, our practice will bring prosperity. There will be no cause for spite and hostility. This is how our religion teaches us.

If we determine the precepts simply out of tradition, then even though the Ajahn teaches the truth, our practice will be deficient. We may be able to study the teachings and repeat them, but we have to practise them if we really want to understand. If we do not develop the practice, this may well be an obstacle to our penetrating to the heart of Buddhism for countless lifetimes to come. We will not understand the essence of the Buddhist religion.

Therefore the practice is like a key, the key of meditation. If we have the right key in our hand, no matter how tightly the lock is closed, when we take the key and turn it, the lock falls open. If we have no key we can't open the lock. We will never know what is in the trunk.

Actually there are two kinds of knowledge. One who knows the Dhamma doesn't simply speak from memory, he speaks the truth. Worldly people usually speak with conceit. For example, suppose there were two people who hadn't seen each other for a long time, maybe they had gone to live in different provinces or countries for a while, and then one day they happened to meet on the train, 'Oh! What a surprise. I was just thinking of looking you up!' Perhaps it's not true. Really they hadn't thought of each other at all, but they say so out of excitement. And so it becomes a lie. Yes, it's lying out of heedlessness. This is lying without knowing it. It's a subtle form of defilement, and it happens very often.

So with regard to the mind, Tuccho Pothila followed the instructions of the novice: breathing in, breathing out, mindfully aware of each breath, until he saw the liar within him, the lying of his own mind. He saw the defilements as they came up, just like the lizard coming out of the termite mound. He saw them and perceived their true nature as soon as they arose. He noticed how one minute the mind would concoct one thing, the next moment something else.

Thinking is a *sankhata dhamma*, something which is created or concocted from supporting conditions. It's not *asankhata dhamma*, the unconditioned. The well-trained mind, one with perfect awareness, does not concoct mental

states. This kind of mind penetrates to the Noble Truths and transcends any need to depend on externals. To know the Noble Truths is to know the truth. The proliferating mind tries to avoid this truth, saying, 'that's good' or 'this is beautiful', but if there is *Buddho* in the mind it can no longer deceive us, because we know the mind as it is. The mind can no longer create deluded mental states, because there is the clear awareness that all mental states are unstable, imperfect, and a source of suffering to one who clings to them.

For Tuccho Pothila, 'the one who knows' was constantly in his mind, wherever he went. He observed the various creations and proliferation of the mind with understanding. He saw how the mind lied in so many ways. He grasped the essence of the practice, seeing that 'This lying mind is the one to watch - this is the one which leads us into extremes of happiness and suffering and causes us to endlessly spin around in the cycle of 'samsāra', with its pleasure and pain, good and evil - all because of this lying mind.' Tuccho Pothila realized the truth, and grasped the essence of the practice, just like a man grasping the tail of the lizard. He saw the workings of the deluded mind.

For us it's the same. Only this mind is important. That's why we need to train the mind. Now if the mind is the mind, what are we going to train it with? By having continuous sati and *sampajañña* we will be able to know the mind. This one who knows is a step beyond the mind, it is that which knows the state of the mind. The mind is the mind. That which knows the mind as simply mind is the one who knows. It is above the mind. The one who knows is above the mind, and that is how it is able to look after the mind, to teach the mind to know what is right and what is wrong. In the end everything comes back to this proliferating mind. If the mind is caught up in its proliferations there is no awareness and the practice is fruitless.

So we must train this mind to hear the Dhamma, to cultivate the *Buddho*, the clear and radiant awareness; that which exists above and beyond the ordinary mind, and knows all that goes on within it. This is why we meditate on the word *Buddho*, so that we can know the mind beyond the mind. Just observe all the mind's movements, whether good or bad, until the one who knows realizes that the mind is simply mind, not a self or a person. This is called *cittānupassanā*, contemplation of mind.² Seeing in this way we will understand that the mind is transient, imperfect and ownerless. This mind doesn't belong to us.

We can summarize thus: the mind is that which acknowledges sense objects; sense objects are sense objects as distinct from the mind; 'the one who knows' knows both the mind and the sense objects for what they are. We must use sati to constantly cleanse the mind. Everybody has sati, even a cat has it when it's

going to catch a mouse. A dog has it when it barks at people. This is a form of sati, but it's not sati according to the Dhamma. Everybody has sati, but there are different levels of it, just as there are different levels of looking at things. For instance, when I say to contemplate the body, some people say, 'What is there to contemplate in the body? Anybody can see it. *Kesā* we can see already, *lomā* we can see already, hair, nails, teeth and skin we can see already. So what?'

This is how people are. They can see the body all right but their seeing is faulty, they don't see with the *Buddho*, 'the one who knows', the awakened one. They only see the body in the ordinary way, they see it visually. Simply to see the body is not enough. If we only see the body there is trouble. You must see the body within the body, then things become much clearer. Just seeing the body you get fooled by it, charmed by its appearance. Not seeing transience, imperfection and ownerlessness, *kāmachanda* arises. You become fascinated by forms, sounds, odours, flavours and feelings. Seeing in this way is to see with the mundane eye of the flesh, causing you to love and hate and discriminate into pleasant and unpleasant feeling.

The Buddha taught that this is not enough. You must see with the 'mind's eye'. See the body within the body. If you really look into the body, Ugh! It's so repulsive. There are today's things and yesterday's things all mixed up in there, you can't tell what's what. Seeing in this way is much clearer than to see with the carnal eye. Contemplate, see with the eye of the mind, with the wisdom eye.

People understand this in different ways. Some people don't know what there is to contemplate in the five meditations, head hair, body hair, nails, teeth and skin. They say they can see all those things already, but they can only see them with the carnal eye, with this 'crazy eye' which only looks at the things it wants to look at. To see the body in the body you have to look more clearly.

This is the practice that can uproot clinging to the five *khandhas*. To uproot attachment is to uproot suffering, because attachment to the five *khandhas* is the cause of suffering. If suffering arises it is here. It's not that the five *khandhas* are in themselves suffering, but the clinging to them as being one's own, that's suffering.

If you see the truth of these things clearly through meditation practice, then suffering becomes unwound, like a screw or a bolt. When the bolt is unwound, it withdraws. The mind unwinds in the same way, letting go; withdrawing from the obsession with good and evil, possessions, praise and status, happiness and suffering.

If we don't know the truth of these things it's like tightening the screw all the

time. It gets tighter and tighter until it's crushing you and you suffer over everything. When you know how things are then you unwind the screw. In Dhamma language we call this the arising of *nibbidā*, disenchantment. You become weary of things and lay down the fascination with them. If you unwind in this way you will find peace.

The cause of suffering is clinging to things. So we should get rid of the cause, cut off its root and not allow it to cause suffering again. People have only one problem - the problem of clinging. Just because of this one thing people will kill each other. All problems, be they individual, family or social, arise from this one root. Nobody wins, they kill each other but in the end no-one gets anything. It is all pointless, I don't know why people keep on killing each other.

Power, possessions, status, praise, happiness and suffering - these are the worldly dhammas. These worldly dhammas engulf worldly beings. Worldly beings are led around by the worldly dhammas: gain and loss, acclaim and slander, status and loss of status, happiness and suffering. These dhammas are trouble makers; if you don't reflect on their true nature you will suffer. People even commit murder for the sake of wealth, status or power. Why? Because they take this too seriously. They get appointed to some position and it goes to their heads, like the man who became headman of the village. After his appointment he became 'power-drunk'. If any of his old friends came to see him he'd say, 'Don't come around so often. Things aren't the same anymore.'

The Buddha taught us to understand the nature of possessions, status, praise and happiness. Take these things as they come but let them be. Don't let them go to your head. If you don't really understand these things, you become fooled by your power, your children and relatives, by everything! If you understand them clearly, you know they're all impermanent conditions. If you cling to them, they become defiled.

All of these things arise afterwards. When people are first born there are simply *nāma* and *rūpa*, that's all. We add on the business of 'Mr. Jones', 'Miss Smith' or whatever later on. This is done according to convention. Still later there are the appendages of 'Colonel', 'General' and so on. If we don't really understand these things we think they are real and carry them around with us. We carry possessions, status, name and rank around. If you have power you can call all the tunes ... 'Take this one and execute him. Take that one and throw him in jail.' Rank gives power. Clinging takes hold here at this word, 'rank'. As soon as people have rank they start giving orders; right or wrong, they just act on their moods. So they go on making the same old mistakes, deviating further and further from the true path.

One who understands the Dhamma won't behave like this. Good and evil

have been in the world since who knows when. If possessions and status come your way, then let them simply be possessions and status - don't let them become your identity. Just use them to fulfil your obligations and leave it at that. You remain unchanged. If we have meditated on these things, no matter what comes our way we will not be misled by it. We will be untroubled, unaffected and constant. Everything is pretty much the same, after all.

This is how the Buddha wanted us to understand things. No matter what you receive, the mind does not add anything to it. They appoint you a city councillor, 'Okay, so I'm a city councillor, but I'm not.' They appoint you head of the group, 'Sure I am, but I'm not.' Whatever they make of you, 'Yes I am, but I'm not!' In the end what are we anyway? We all just die in the end. No matter what they make you, in the end it's all the same. What can you say? If you can see things in this way you will have a solid abiding and true contentment. Nothing is changed.

Don't be fooled by things. Whatever comes your way, it's just conditions. There's nothing which can entice a mind like this to create or proliferate, to seduce it into greed, aversion or delusion.

This is what it is to be a true supporter of Buddhism. Whether you are among those who are being supported (i.e., the Sangha) or those who are supporting (the laity) please consider this thoroughly. Cultivate the *sīla-dhamma* within you. This is the surest way to support Buddhism. To support Buddhism with the offerings of food, shelter and medicine is good also, but such offerings only reach the 'sapwood' of Buddhism. Please don't forget this. A tree has bark, sapwood and heartwood, and these three parts are interdependent. The heartwood must rely on the bark and the sapwood. The sapwood relies on the bark and the heartwood. They all exist interdependently, just like the teachings of moral discipline, concentration and wisdom.³ The teaching on moral discipline is to establish your speech and actions in rectitude. The teaching on concentration is to firmly fix the mind. The teaching on wisdom is the thorough understanding of the nature of all conditions. Study this, practise this, and you will understand Buddhism in the most profound way.

If you don't realize these things, you will be fooled by possessions, fooled by rank, fooled by anything you come into contact with. Simply supporting Buddhism in the external way will never put an end to the fighting and squabbling, the grudges and animosity, the stabbing and shooting. If these things are to cease we must reflect on the nature of possessions, rank, praise, happiness and suffering. We must consider our lives and bring them in line with the teaching. We should reflect that all beings in the world are part of one whole. We are like them, they are like us. They have happiness and

suffering just like we do. It's all much the same. If we reflect in this way, peace and understanding will arise. This is the foundation of Buddhism.

¹: Literally: knowledge and insight (into the Four Noble Truths).

²: One of the four foundations of mindfulness: body, feeling, mind, and dhammas.

³: Sīla, samādhi, paññā.

Transcendence

When the group of five ascetics¹ abandoned the Buddha, he saw it as a stroke of luck, because he would be able to continue his practice unhindered. With the five ascetics living with him, things weren't so peaceful, he had responsibilities. And now the five ascetics had abandoned him because they felt that he had slackened his practice and reverted to indulgence. Previously he had been intent on his ascetic practices and self-mortification. In regards to eating, sleeping and so on, he had tormented himself severely, but it came to a point where, looking into it honestly, he saw that such practices just weren't working. It was simply a matter of views, practising out of pride and clinging. He had mistaken worldly values and mistaken himself for the truth.

For example, if one decides to throw oneself into ascetic practices with the intention of gaining praise - this kind of practice is all 'world-inspired', practising for adulation and fame. Practising with this kind of intention is called 'mistaking worldly ways for truth'.

Another way to practise is 'to mistake one's own views for truth'. You only believe in yourself, in your own practice. No matter what others say you stick to your own preferences. You don't carefully consider the practice. This is called 'mistaking oneself for truth'.

Whether you take the world or take yourself to be truth, it's all simply blind attachment. The Buddha saw this, and saw that there was no 'adhering to the Dhamma', practising for the truth. So his practice had been fruitless, he still hadn't given up defilements.

Then he turned around and reconsidered all the work he had put into practice right from the beginning in terms of results. What were the results of all that practice? Looking deeply into it he saw that it just wasn't right. It was full of conceit, and full of the world. There was no Dhamma, no insight into not-self, *anattā*, no emptiness or letting go. There may have been letting go of a kind, but it was the kind that still hadn't let go.

Looking carefully at the situation, the Buddha saw that even if he were to explain these things to the five ascetics they wouldn't be able to understand. It wasn't something he could easily convey to them, because those ascetics were still firmly entrenched in the old way of practice and seeing things. The Buddha saw that you could practise like that until your dying day, maybe even starve to death, and achieve nothing, because such practice is inspired by worldly values and by pride.

Considering deeply, he saw the right practice, *sammā-patipadā*: the mind is the mind, the body is the body. The body isn't desire or defilement. Even if

you were to destroy the body you wouldn't destroy defilements. That's not their source. Even fasting and going without sleep until the body was a shrivelled-up wraith wouldn't exhaust the defilements. But the belief that defilements could be dispelled in that way, the teaching of self-mortification, was deeply ingrained into the five ascetics.

The Buddha then began to take more food, eating as normal, practising in a more natural way. When the five ascetics saw the change in the Buddha's practice they figured that he had given up and reverted to sensual indulgence. One person's understanding was shifting to a higher level, transcending appearances, while the other saw that that person's view was sliding downwards, reverting to comfort. Self-mortification was deeply ingrained into the minds of the five ascetics because the Buddha had previously taught and practised like that. Now he saw the fault in it. By seeing the fault in it clearly, he was able to let it go.

When the five ascetics saw the Buddha doing this they left him, feeling that because he was practising wrongly they would no longer follow him. Just as birds abandon a tree which no longer offers sufficient shade, or fish leave a pool of water that is too small, too dirty or not cool, just so did the five ascetics abandon the Buddha.

So now the Buddha concentrated on contemplating the Dhamma. He ate more comfortably and lived more naturally. He let the mind be simply the mind, the body simply the body. He didn't force his practice in excess, just enough to loosen the grip of greed, aversion, and delusion. Previously he had walked the two extremes: *kāmasukhallikānuyogo* - if happiness or love arose he would be aroused and attach to them. He would identify with them and he wouldn't let go. If he encountered pleasantness he would stick to that, if he encountered suffering he would stick to that. These two extremes he called *kāmasukhallikānuyogo* and *attakilamathānuyogo*.

The Buddha had been stuck on conditions. He saw clearly that these two ways are not the way for a *samana*. Clinging to happiness, clinging to suffering: a *samana* is not like this. To cling to those things is not the way. Clinging to those things he was stuck in the views of self and the world. If he were to flounder in these two ways he would never become one who clearly knew the world. He would be constantly running from one extreme to the other. Now the Buddha fixed his attention on the mind itself and concerned himself with training that.

All facets of nature proceed according to their supporting conditions; they aren't any problem in themselves. For instance, illnesses in the body. The body experiences pain, sickness, fever and colds and so on. These all naturally occur. Actually people worry about their bodies too much. They

worry about and cling to their bodies so much because of wrong view, they can't let go.

Look at this hall here. We build the hall and say it's ours, but lizards come and live here, rats and geckos come and live here, and we are always driving them away, because we see that the hall belongs to us, not the rats and lizards.

It's the same with illnesses in the body. We take this body to be our home, something that really belongs to us. If we happen to get a headache or stomach-ache we get upset, we don't want the pain and suffering. These legs are 'our legs', we don't want them to hurt, these arms are 'our arms', we don't want anything to go wrong with them. We've got to cure all pains and illnesses at all costs.

This is where we are fooled and stray from the truth. We are simply visitors to this body. Just like this hall here, it's not really ours. We are simply temporary tenants, like the rats, lizards and geckos - but we don't know this. This body is the same. Actually the Buddha taught that there is no abiding self within this body, but we go and grasp on to it as being our self, as really being 'us' and 'them'. When the body changes we don't want it to do so. No matter how much we are told, we don't understand. If I say it straight you get even more fooled. 'This isn't yourself,' I say, and you go even more astray, you get even more confused and your practice just reinforces the self.

So most people don't really see the self. One who sees the self is one who sees that 'this is neither the self nor belonging to self'. He sees the self as it is in nature. Seeing the self through the power of clinging is not real seeing. Clinging interferes with the whole business. It's not easy to realize this body as it is because *upādāna* clings fast to it all.

Therefore it is said that we must investigate to clearly know with wisdom. This means to investigate the *sankhārā* according to their true nature, use wisdom. Knowing the true nature of *sankhārā* is wisdom. If you don't know the true nature of *sankhārā* you are at odds with them, always resisting them. Now, it is better to let go of the *sankhārā* than to try to oppose or resist them. And yet we plead with them to comply with our wishes. We look for all sorts of means to organize them or 'make a deal' with them. If the body gets sick and is in pain we don't want it to be, so we look for various suttas to chant, such as *Bojjhango*, the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, the *Anattalakkhana Sutta* and so on. We don't want the body to be in pain, we want to protect it, control it. These suttas become some form of mystical ceremony, getting us even more entangled in clinging. This is because they chant them in order to ward off illness, to prolong life and so on. Actually the Buddha gave us these teachings in order to see clearly, but we end up chanting them to increase our delusion. *Rūpam aniccam, vedanā aniccā, saññā aniccā, sankhārā aniccā,*

*viññānam aniccam.*² We don't chant these words for increasing our delusion. They are recollections to help us know the truth of the body, so that we can let it go and give up our longing.

This is called chanting to cut things down, but we tend to chant in order to extend them all, or if we feel they're too long we try chanting to shorten them, to force nature to conform to our wishes. It's all delusion. All the people sitting there in the hall are deluded, every one of them. The ones chanting are deluded, the ones listening are deluded, they're all deluded! All they can think is, 'How can we avoid suffering?' When are they ever going to practise?

Whenever illnesses arise, those who know see nothing strange about it. Getting born into this world entails experiencing illness. However, even the Buddha and the Noble Ones, contracting illness in the course of things, would also, in the course of things, treat it with medicine. For them it was simply a matter of correcting the elements. They didn't blindly cling to the body or grasp at mystic ceremonies and such. They treated illnesses with right view, they didn't treat them with delusion. 'If it heals, it heals, if it doesn't then it doesn't' - that's how they saw things.

They say that nowadays Buddhism in Thailand is thriving, but it looks to me like it's sunk almost as far as it can go. The Dhamma Halls are full of attentive ears, but they're attending wrongly. Even the senior members of the community are like this; so everybody just leads each other into more delusion.

One who sees this will know that the true practice is almost opposite from where most people are going; the two sides can barely understand each other. How are those people going to transcend suffering? They have chants for realizing the truth but they turn around and use them to increase their delusion. They turn their backs on the right path. One goes eastward, the other goes west - how are they ever going to meet? They're not even close to each other.

If you have looked into this you will see that this is the case. Most people are lost. But how can you tell them? Everything has become rites and rituals and mystic ceremonies. They chant but they chant with foolishness, they don't chant with wisdom. They study, but they study with foolishness, not with wisdom. They know, but they know foolishly, not with wisdom. So they end up going with foolishness, living with foolishness, knowing with foolishness. That's how it is. And regarding teaching, all they do these days is teach people to be stupid. They say they're teaching people to be clever, giving them knowledge, but when you look at it in terms of truth, you see that they're really teaching people to go astray and grasp at deceptions.

The real foundation of the teaching is in order to see *attā*, the sense of self, as being empty, having no fixed identity. It's void of intrinsic being. But people come to the study of Dhamma to increase their self-view; they don't want to experience suffering or difficulty. They want everything to be cosy. They may want to transcend suffering, but if there is still a self how can they ever do so?

Suppose we came to possess a very expensive object. The minute that thing comes into our possession our mind changes. 'Now, where can I keep it? If I leave it there somebody might steal it.' We worry ourselves into a state, trying to find a place to keep it. And when did the mind change? It changed the minute we obtained that object - suffering arose right then. No matter where we leave that object we can't relax, so we're left with trouble. Whether sitting, walking, or lying down, we are lost in worry.

This is suffering. And when did it arise? It arose as soon as we understood that we had obtained something, that's where the suffering lies. Before we had that object there was no suffering. It hadn't yet arisen because there wasn't yet an object for us to cling to.

Attā, the self, is the same. If we think in terms of 'my self', then everything around us becomes 'mine'. Confusion follows. Why so? The cause of it all is that there is a self; we don't peel off the apparent in order to see the transcendent. You see, the self is only an appearance. You have to peel away the appearances in order to see the heart of the matter, which is transcendence. Upturn the apparent to find the transcendent.

You could compare it to unthreshed rice. Can unthreshed rice be eaten? Sure it can, but you must thresh it first. Get rid of the husks and you will find the grain inside. Now if we don't thresh the husks we won't find the grain. Like a dog sleeping on the pile of unthreshed grain. Its stomach is rumbling 'jork-jork-jork,' but all it can do is lie there, thinking, 'Where can I get something to eat?' When it's hungry it bounds off the pile of rice grain and runs off looking for scraps of food. Even though it's sleeping right on top of a pile of food it knows nothing of it. Why? It can't see the rice. Dogs can't eat unthreshed rice. The food is there but the dog can't eat it.

We may have learning but if we don't practise accordingly we still don't really know; we are just as oblivious as the dog sleeping on the pile of rice grain. It's sleeping on a pile of food but it knows nothing of it. When it gets hungry it's got to jump off and go trotting around elsewhere for food. It's a shame, isn't it? There is rice grain but what is hiding it? The husk hides the grain, so the dog can't eat it. And there is the transcendent. What hides it? The apparent conceals the transcendent, making people simply 'sit on top of the pile of rice, unable to eat it,' unable to practise, unable to see the transcendent. And so they simply get stuck in appearances time and again. If you are stuck

in appearances, suffering is in store. You will be beset by becoming, birth, old age, sickness and death.

So there isn't anything else blocking people off, they are blocked right here. People who study the Dhamma without penetrating to its true meaning are just like the dog on the pile of unthreshed rice who doesn't know the rice. He might even starve and still find nothing to eat. A dog can't eat unthreshed rice, it doesn't even know there is food there. After a long time without food it may even die, on top of that pile of rice! People are like this. No matter how much we study the Dhamma of the Buddha we won't see it if we don't practise. If we don't see it, then we don't know it.

Don't go thinking that by learning a lot and knowing a lot you'll know the Buddha Dhamma. That's like saying you've seen everything there is to see just because you've got eyes, or that you've got ears. You may see but you don't see fully. You see only with the 'outer eye', not with the 'inner eye'; you hear with the 'outer ear', not with the 'inner ear'.

If you upturn the apparent and reveal the transcendent, you will reach the truth and see clearly. You will uproot the apparent and uproot clinging.

But this is like some sort of sweet fruit: even though the fruit is sweet we must rely on contact with and experience of that fruit before we will know what the taste is like. Now that fruit, even though no-one tastes it, is sweet all the same. But nobody knows of it. The Dhamma of the Buddha is like this. Even though it's the truth it isn't true for those who don't really know it. No matter how excellent or fine it may be it is worthless to them.

So why do people grab after suffering? Who in this world wants to inflict suffering on themselves? No one, of course. Nobody wants suffering and yet people keep creating the causes of suffering, just as if they were wandering around looking for suffering. Within their hearts people are looking for happiness, they don't want suffering. Then why is it that this mind of ours creates so much suffering? Just seeing this much is enough. We don't like suffering and yet why do we create suffering for ourselves? It's easy to see, it can only be because we don't know suffering, we don't know the end of suffering. That's why people behave the way they do. How could they not suffer when they continue to behave in this way?

These people have *micchā-ditthi*³ but they don't see that it's *micchā-ditthi*. Whatever we say, believe in or do which results in suffering is all wrong view. If it wasn't wrong view it wouldn't result in suffering; we couldn't cling to suffering, nor to happiness or to any condition at all. We would leave things be their natural way, like a flowing stream of water. We don't have to dam it up, we should just let it flow along its natural course.

The flow of Dhamma is like this, but the flow of the ignorant mind tries to resist the Dhamma in the form of wrong view. Suffering is there because of wrong view - this people don't see. This is worth looking into. Whenever we have wrong view we will experience suffering. If we don't experience it in the present it will manifest later on.

People go astray right here. What is blocking them off? The apparent blocks off the transcendent, preventing people from seeing things clearly. People study, they learn, they practise, but they practise with ignorance, just like a person who's lost his bearings. He walks to the west but thinks he's walking east, or walks to the north thinking he's walking south. This is how far people have gone astray. This kind of practice is really only the dregs of practice, in fact it's a disaster. It's a disaster because they turn around and go in the opposite direction, they fall from the objective of true Dhamma practice.

This state of affairs causes suffering and yet people think that doing this, memorizing that, studying such-and-such will be a cause for the cessation of suffering. Just like a person who wants a lot of things. He tries to amass as much as possible, thinking if he gets enough his suffering will abate. This is how people think, but their thinking goes astray of the true path, just like one person going northward, another going southward, and yet both believing they're going the same way.

Most people are still stuck in the mass of suffering, still wandering in *samsāra*, just because they think like this. If illness or pain arise, all they can do is wonder how they can get rid of it. They want it to stop as fast as possible, they've got to cure it at all costs. They don't consider that this is the normal way of *sankhārā*. Nobody thinks like this. The body changes and people can't endure it, they can't accept it, they've got to get rid of it at all costs. However, in the end they can't win, they can't beat the truth. It all collapses. This is something people don't want to look at, they continually reinforce their wrong view.

Practising to realize the Dhamma is the most excellent of things. Why did the Buddha develop all the Perfections? So that he could realize this and enable others to see the Dhamma, know the Dhamma, practise the Dhamma and be the Dhamma - so that they could let go and not be burdened.

'Don't cling to things.' Or to put it another way: 'Hold, but don't hold fast.' This is also right. If we see something we pick it up, 'oh, it's this'; then we lay it down. We see something else, pick it up and hold it, but not fast. We hold it just long enough to consider it, to know it, then to let it go. If you hold without letting go, carry without laying down the burden, then you are going to be heavy. If you pick something up and carry it for a while, then when it gets heavy you should lay it down, throw it off. Don't make suffering for

yourself.

This we should know as the cause of suffering. If we know the cause of suffering, suffering can not arise. For either happiness or suffering to arise there must be the *attā*, the self. There must be the 'I' and 'mine', there must be this appearance. If when all these things arise the mind goes straight to the transcendent, it removes the appearances. It removes the delight, the aversion and the clinging from those things. Just as when something that we value gets lost, when we find it again our worries disappear.

Even before we see that object our worries may be relieved. At first we think it's lost and suffer over it, but there comes a day when we suddenly remember, 'Oh, that's right! I put it over there, now I remember!' As soon as we remember this, as soon as we see the truth, even if we haven't laid eyes on that object, we feel happy. This is called 'seeing within', seeing with the mind's eye, not seeing with the outer eye. If we see with the mind's eye then even though we haven't laid eyes on that object we are already relieved.

Similarly, when we cultivate Dhamma practice and attain the Dhamma, see the Dhamma, then whenever we encounter a problem we solve the problem instantly, right then and there. It disappears completely, it is laid down, released.

The Buddha wanted us to contact the Dhamma, but people only contact the words, the books and the scriptures. This is contacting that which is about Dhamma, not contacting the actual Dhamma as taught by our great teacher. How can people say they are practising well and properly? They are a long way off.

The Buddha was known as *lokavidū*, having clearly realized the world. Right now we see the world all right, but not clearly. The more we know the darker the world becomes, because our knowledge is murky, it's not clear knowledge. It's faulty. This is called 'knowing through darkness', lacking in light and radiance.

People are only stuck here but it's no trifling matter. It's important. Most people want goodness and happiness but they just don't know what the causes for that goodness and happiness are. Whatever it may be, if we haven't yet seen the harm of it we can't give it up. No matter how bad it may be, we still can't give it up if we haven't truly seen the harm of it. However, if we really see the harm of something beyond a doubt, then we can let it go. As soon as we see the harm of something, and the benefit of giving it up, there's an immediate change.

Why is it we are still unattained, still can not let go? It's because we still don't see the harm clearly, our knowledge is faulty, it's dark. That's why we can't

let go. If we knew clearly like the Lord Buddha or the arahant disciples we would surely let go, our problems would dissolve completely with no difficulty at all.

When your ears hear sound, let them do their job. When your eyes perform their function with forms, let them do so. When your nose works with smells, let it do its job. When your body experiences sensations, then it perform its natural functions. Where will problems arise? There are no problems.

In the same way, all those things which belong to the apparent, leave them with the apparent and acknowledge that which is the transcendent. Simply be the 'one who knows', knowing without fixation, knowing and letting things be their natural way. All things are just as they are.

All our belongings, does anybody really own them? Does our father own them, or our mother, or our relatives? Nobody really gets anything. That's why the Buddha said to let all those things be, let them go. Know them clearly. Know them by holding, but not fast. Use things in a way that is beneficial, not in a harmful way by holding fast to them until suffering arises.

To know Dhamma you must know in this way. That is, to know in such a way as to transcend suffering. This sort of knowledge is important. Knowing about how to make things, to use tools, knowing all the various sciences of the world and so on, all have their place, but they are not the supreme knowledge. The Dhamma must be known as I've explained it here. You don't have to know a whole lot, just this much is enough for the Dhamma practitioner - to know and then let go.

It's not that you have to die before you can transcend suffering, you know. You transcend suffering in this very life because you know how to solve problems. You know the apparent, you know the transcendent. Do it in this lifetime, while you are here practising. You won't find it anywhere else. Don't cling to things. Hold, but don't cling.

You may wonder, 'Why does the Ajahn keep saying this?' How could I teach otherwise, how could I say otherwise, when the truth is just as I've said it? Even though it's the truth don't hold fast to even that! If you cling to it blindly it becomes a falsehood. Like a dog if you grab its leg. If you don't let go the dog will spin around and bite you. Just try it out. All animals behave like this. If you don't let go it's got no choice but to bite. The apparent is the same. We live in accordance with conventions. They are here for our convenience in this life, but they are not things to be clung to so hard that they cause suffering. Just let things pass.

Whenever we feel that we are definitely right, so much so that we refuse to open up to anything or anybody else, right there we are wrong. It becomes

wrong view. When suffering arises, where does it arise from? The cause is wrong view, the fruit of that being suffering. If it was right view it wouldn't cause suffering.

So I say, 'Allow space, don't cling to things.' 'Right' is just another supposition; just let it pass. 'Wrong' is another apparent condition; just let it be that. If you feel you are right and yet others contend the issue, don't argue, just let it go. As soon as you know, let go. This is the straight way.

Usually it's not like this. People don't often give in to each other. That's why some people, even Dhamma practitioners who still don't know themselves, may say things that are utter foolishness and yet think they're being wise. They may say something that's so stupid that others can't even bear to listen and yet they think they are being cleverer than others. Other people can't even listen to it and yet they think they are smart, that they are right. They are simply advertising their own stupidity.

That's why the wise say, 'Whatever speech disregards *aniccam* is not the speech of a wise person, it's the speech of a fool. It's deluded speech. It's the speech of one who doesn't know that suffering is going to arise right there.'

For example, suppose you had decided to go to Bangkok tomorrow and someone were to ask, 'Are you going to Bangkok tomorrow?' 'I hope to go to Bangkok. If there are no obstacles I'll probably go.' This is called speaking with the Dhamma in mind, speaking with *aniccam* in mind, taking into account the truth, the transient, uncertain nature of the world. You don't say, 'Yes, I'm definitely going tomorrow.' If it turns out you don't go, what are you going to do, send news to all the people who you told you were going? You'd be just talking nonsense.

There's still much more to the practice of Dhamma; it becomes more and more refined. But if you don't see it, you may think you are speaking right even when you are speaking wrongly and straying from the true nature of things with every word. And yet you may think you are speaking the truth. To put it simply: anything that we say or do that causes suffering to arise should be known as *micchā-ditthi*. It's delusion and foolishness.

Most practitioners don't reflect in this way. Whatever they like, they think is right and they just go on believing themselves. For instance, they may receive some gift or title, be it an object, rank or even words of praise, and they think it's good. They take it as some sort of permanent condition. So they get puffed up with pride and conceit, they don't consider, 'Who am I? Where is this so-called 'goodness?' Where did it come from? Do others have the same things?'

The Buddha taught that we should conduct ourselves normally. If we don't

dig in, chew over and look into this point, it means it's still sunk within us. It means these conditions are still buried within our hearts - we are still sunk in wealth, rank and praise. So we become someone else because of them. We think we are better than before, that we are something special and so all sorts of confusion arises.

Actually, in truth there isn't anything to human beings. Whatever we may be it's only in the realm of appearances. If we take away the apparent and see the transcendent we see that there isn't anything there. There are simply the universal characteristics - birth in the beginning, change in the middle and cessation in the end. This is all there is. If we see that all things are like this, then no problems arise. If we understand this we will have contentment and peace.

Where trouble arises is when we think like the five ascetic disciples of the Buddha. They followed the instruction of their teacher, but when he changed his practice they couldn't understand what he thought or knew. They decided that the Buddha had given up his practice and reverted to indulgence. If we were in that position we'd probably think the same thing and there'd be no way to correct it. We'd be holding on to the old ways, thinking in the lower way, yet believing it's higher. We'd see the Buddha and think he'd given up the practice and reverted to indulgence, just like those five ascetics: consider how many years they had been practising at that time, and yet they still went astray, they still weren't proficient.

So I say to practise and also to look at the results of your practice. Look especially where you refuse to follow, where there is friction. Where there is no friction, there is no problem, things flow. If there is friction, they don't flow; you set up a self and things become solid, like a mass of clinging. There is no give and take.

Most monks and cultivators tend to be like this. However they've thought in the past they continue to think. They refuse to change, they don't reflect. They think they are right so they can't be wrong, but actually 'wrongness' is buried within 'rightness', even though most people don't know that. How is it so? 'This is right' ... but if someone else says it's not right you won't give in, you've got to argue. What is this? *Ditthi-māna*. *Ditthi* means views, *māna* is the attachment to those views. If we attach even to what is right, refusing to concede to anybody, then it becomes wrong. To cling fast to rightness is simply the arising of self, there is no letting go.

This is a point which gives people a lot of trouble, except for those Dhamma practitioners who know that this matter, this point, is a very important one. They will take note of it. If it arises while they're speaking, clinging comes racing on to the scene. Maybe it will linger for some time, perhaps one or two

days, three or four months, a year or two. This is for the slow ones, that is. For the quick, response is instant - they just let go. Clinging arises and immediately there is letting go, they force the mind to let go right then and there.

You must see these two functions operating. Here there is clinging. Now who is the one who resists that clinging? Whenever you experience a mental impression you should observe these two functions operating. There is clinging, and there is one who prohibits the clinging. Now just watch these two things. Maybe you will cling for a long time before you let go.

Reflecting and constantly practising like this, clinging gets lighter, it becomes less and less. Right view increases as wrong view gradually wanes. Clinging decreases, non-clinging arises. This is the way it is for everybody. That's why I say to consider this point. Learn to solve problems in the present moment.

¹: The *pañcavaggiyā*, or 'group of five', who followed the *bodhisatta*, the Buddha-to-be, when he was cultivating ascetic practices, and who left him when he renounced these ascetic practices for the Middle Way.

²: Form is impermanent, feeling is impermanent, perception is impermanent, volition is impermanent, consciousness is impermanent.

³: *Micchā-ditthi*: Wrong-view.

Copyright

The Collected Teachings of Ajahn Chah
Volume 1 - Daily Life Practice

Published by:

Aruna Publications,
Aruna Ratanagiri Buddhist Monastery
2 Harnham Hall Cottages,
Harnham, Belsay,
Northumberland NE20 0HF UK

Contact Aruna Publications at www.aruno.org
This book is available for free download from
www.forestsanghapublications.org

ISBN 978-1-908444-13-4

Digital Edition 1.1

Copyright © 2011 HARNHAM BUDDHIST MONASTERY TRUST

The Dhamma talk titled 'It Can Be Done' has been reprinted from 'Being Dharma' with permission from Shambhala Publications.

In order to make this e-book readable in a variety of electronic formats a simplified form of representing Pali words has been used; some of the diacritical marks have therefore not been included in this edition. To check the spelling of any particular Pali word, please consult the Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary



This work is licenced under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.0 UK: England & Wales Licence. To view a copy of this licence, visit: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.0/uk/>

Summary:

You are free:

- to copy, distribute, display and perform the work

Under the following conditions:

- Attribution: You must give the original author credit.
- Non-Commercial: You may not use this work for commercial purposes.
- No Derivative Works: You may not alter, transform, or build upon this work.

With the understanding that:

- Waiver: Any of the above conditions can be waived if you get permission from the copyright holder.
- Public Domain: Where the work or any of its elements is in the public domain under applicable law, that status is in no way affected by the license.
- Other Rights: In no way are any of the following rights affected by the license:
 - - Your fair dealing or fair use rights, or other applicable copyright exceptions and limitations;
 - The author's moral rights;
 - Rights other persons may have either in the work itself or in how the work is used, such as publicity or privacy rights.
- Notice: For any reuse or distribution, you must make clear to others the licence terms of this work.

Harnham Buddhist Monastery Trust operating as Aruna Publications asserts its moral right to be identified as the author of this book.

Harnham Buddhist Monastery Trust requests that you attribute ownership of the work to Aruna Publications on copying, distribution, display or performance of the work.

Table of Contents

[The Collected Teachings of Ajahn Chah](#)

[Preface](#)

[Introduction](#)

[A Note On The Text](#)

[The Middle Way Within](#)

[The Peace Beyond](#)

[Convention And Liberation](#)

[No Abiding](#)

[Evening Sitting](#)

[About Being Careful](#)

[It Can Be Done](#)

[Understanding Dukkha](#)

[The Dhamma Goes Westward](#)

[Even One Word Is Enough](#)

[Making The Heart Good](#)

[Why Are We Here?](#)

[Our Real Home](#)

[The Four Noble Truths](#)

[Living In The World](#)

[Tuccho Pothila](#)

[Transcendence](#)

[Copyright](#)